



Top, Downy Woodpecker. Center, Carolina Wren. Bottom, Ruby-throated Hummingbird. Photos: Paula Duenas

### **This Month's Program: February 16, 2023 Making Your Backyard a Bird Haven by Jason Peliwo**

On Thursday, February 16th at 7 p.m., join Orange Audubon Society (OAS) at Leu Gardens for a program on Making Your Backyard a Bird Haven. Jason Peliwo, who with his wife Laura owns Wild Birds Unlimited in Winter Springs, has years of experience in choosing the best types of bird feed and best designed feeders to attract all the beautiful birds you want to see. Jason's feeders and strategies can help you prevent or minimize squirrel attacks.

OAS works hard to teach about [plants for birds](#) (January OAS*is*, p.3) but with spring upon us and summer coming soon, supplying additional foods and specific nesting options can greatly diversify the visitors to your yard.

Join us at Leu Gardens for an informative program. See below for address.

*Paula Duenas, Programs Chair*

### **Orlando Wetlands Festival February 18, 2023**

The Wetlands Festival is back and this time it will be held entirely at the Orlando Wetlands Park! This free event is Saturday, February 18, 2023 from 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

With its new boardwalk and an education center on the way, Orlando Wetlands Park has become a mecca for birders (250 species seen!). Photographers and people who just want to get outdoors are flocking there as well.

If the park looks natural, it has not come without a lot of work. The area was once wet prairie draining into the Econlockhatchee River system, but, as early as the Civil War, portions were drained for ranching. Needing a place to discharge wastewater from the Iron Bridge treatment plant in East Orlando, the City of Orlando purchased 1,650 acres from a ranching family. In 1987, 1,220 acres of former pasture land was converted to a man-made wetland treatment system, called the Orlando Easterly Wetlands.



If you take one of the bus rides at the festival, you will be shown where the chlorine-treated wastewater comes in and where it goes out into the Little Econ system, cleansed naturally by the reconstructed marshes.

*Continued next page*

### **Book Your Panhandle Trip**

Orange Audubon Society's Panhandle Trip will be April 26-30, 2023. [See last month's OAS\*is\* \(p.8\)](#) and contact Teresa at [mwilliams@cfl.rr.com](mailto:mwilliams@cfl.rr.com) or (407) 718-1977 to register.

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

Programs are the 3rd Thursday of each month (September-June) at 7:00 p.m. and all but December are at

#### **Harry P. Leu Gardens**

in the Camellia Room at 1920 North Forest Ave., Orlando, FL 32803

For map and directions, visit:

[www.leugardens.org/plan/directions/](http://www.leugardens.org/plan/directions/)





**Great Florida  
Riverway Reunion**

**Magnolia Park, February 4, 2023**

Orange Audubon Society supports the cause of restoring the Ocklawaha River ([see January 2022 OASis p. 2](#)). On Saturday, February 4th, at 10 a.m., OAS will join others who love the Ocklawaha and St. Johns Rivers and Silver Springs in a lakeside event at Magnolia Park, 2929 S. Binion Road, Apopka. Wear a solid blue, green or orange shirt. For details [see this link](#) or contact Margaret Spontak at (352) 229-2887.

**Orange County Wetlands**

Florida has lost the most acreage of wetlands of any state since 1845, over 9 million acres, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

And Orange County being one of the fastest growing counties (with a nearly 25% population increase in the past 10 years, according to the 2020 census) has experienced significant wetland loss.

According to the January 24th staff presentation for the Orange County Board of County Commissioners (BCC), wet prairie is the wetland habitat that has been reduced the most, but all of the wetland habitats have lost acreage.

Orange Audubon Society's (OAS) conservation committee has written to the BCC encouraging saving even small urban wetlands and pointing out that retention ponds do not provide the same ecosystem services.

Other points we made are that since parts of Orange County experienced flooding from the 2022 hurricanes, the BCC and staff working on the ordinance should not follow the suggestion from consultants working for developers to remove floodplain review from the Conservation Area Impact permit process. Allowing new development in floodplains will continue to exacerbate flooding problems for existing residents. Please, if you care about wetlands and other local conservation issues and have any time at all, assist our volunteer conservation efforts.

Join the OAS Conservation Committee and write letters as needed. Email [conservation@orangeaudubonfl.org](mailto:conservation@orangeaudubonfl.org) to join and receive alerts. Thank you.

*Deborah Green*

**Orlando Wetlands Park**

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Orlando Wetlands Park (OWP) was the pioneer in Florida in recreating wetlands to filter wastewater. Filtering either wastewater, stormwater or both, OWP was the model for Sweetwater Wetlands in Gainesville, Viera Wetlands near Melbourne, Wakodahatchee and Green Cay near Boynton Beach, Blue Heron Wetlands in Titusville, and Circle B Bar Reserve near Lakeland, all wonderful wildlife viewing sites. The Lake Apopka Marsh Flow Way is also a constructed wetland, cleaning water going into Lake Apopka.

City of Orlando purchased the property from a ranching family, but the family had retained winter hunting rights. The festival was timed each year to celebrate the reopening. In 2016, the City purchased the hunting rights from the family, so the park could be open all year. But the festival continued, now generally every other year.



Bald Eagle ambassador brought by Audubon Center for Birds of Prey to the Orlando Wetlands Festival with support from Orange Audubon Society. Photo: Orlando Wetlands Festival

Orange Audubon Society (OAS) is among the sponsors of the festival, and OAS volunteers guide bus trips, birding walks and photo walks. OAS also supports the festival participation by paying for the presence of Audubon Center for Birds of Prey with live raptors. OAS will be there with an outreach table, this year staffed by three of OAS' Conservation Leadership Initiative participants, and will sell T-shirts and other nature merchandise.

Local environmental groups and agencies will have displays, there will be kids' activities and a native plant give-away. Bring the whole family for a day of outdoor fun and learning. This year's festival is at Orlando Wetlands Park, 25155 Wheeler Road, Christmas, FL, 32709. See you there!



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](mailto:newsletter@orangeaudubonfl.org).

For other membership information, contact: [membership@orangeaudubonfl.org](mailto:membership@orangeaudubonfl.org)

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Birds of Prey Class, January 2023. Photo: Deborah Green

## Birds of Prey ID Trip February 5, 2023

Winter is the time to see raptors on the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive (LAWD), and on Sunday, February 5th, Bob Sanders will lead the second of two Birds of Prey Identification Classes. Bob co-founded the Chimney Rock Hawk Watch in Martinsville, New Jersey before moving to Central Florida and is known locally for his raptor expertise. Time is 7:30 a.m.–1:00 p.m. Cost per person per class is \$10 (Audubon members) or \$15 (non-members). Contact [mwilliams@cfl.rr.com](mailto:mwilliams@cfl.rr.com) or (407) 718-1977 to save your space and for registration and waiver instructions.

## Intermediate Bird Identification March 18 and 25, 2023

Many people have told us they are ready for an Intermediate Bird Identification Class, and Orange Audubon Society has the perfect person to teach it! Bob Sanders taught Beginners Bird Identification for years and is full of identification tips and natural history information. Sessions are on March 18th and March 25th, both at Orlando Wetlands Park from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Cost for the two-part class is \$50 for Audubon members and \$65 for non-members, limited to 12 participants. Contact [mwilliams@cfl.rr.com](mailto:mwilliams@cfl.rr.com) or (407) 718-1977 for registration and waiver instructions.

## Sunrise Photo Shoot, February 5, 2023

Renowned professional photographer, author and nature photography instructor Milton Heiberg will teach a sunrise photo workshop on Sunday, February 5th from 6:00-10:00 a.m. at Orlando Wetlands Park. Participants will photograph the sunrise with water reflections at one of the most scenic locations in Central Florida.



Chertok Photos on Display in the new Magnolia Park EcoEducation Center. Left, *My, What Big Feet You Have!* 2007 Chertok Florida Native Nature Photo Contest, Honorable Mention Winner, Florida's Birds! Category. Photo: Jay Paredes. Right, *Pig Frog*. 2008 Chertok Florida Native Nature Photo Contest, Honorable Mention Winner, Beyond Birds! Category. Photo: Charlie Corbeil

## Count Backyard Birds!

The next Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is February 17-20, 2023. The GBBC was the first community (citizen) science project to collect online data on birds and to display results in near real-time.

In 2022, GBBC participants turned in 359,479 checklists reporting 7,099 species of birds. This creates an annual snapshot of the distribution and abundance of birds.

For at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count, simply tally the numbers and kinds of birds you see.

First [create a free eBird](#) account to enter your checklists. If you already have an eBird (or another Cornell Lab project) account, use your login name and password. Counting instructions are at [this link](#).

Join the fun and contribute to this great citizen science project! You may find a new bird in your “backyard.”

*Mary Keim, GBBC Participant,  
with Kathy Rigling*

## 2023 Chertok Photo Contest Deadline April 20, 2023

Have you been out photographing nature? If not, it's still not too late as the deadline for Orange Audubon Society's 35th annual photo contest is April 20th. The Kit and Sidney Chertok Florida Native Nature Photography Contest was created to promote interest and concern for preserving the native fauna and flora of Florida and to enhance enjoyment of Florida's natural wonders through photography.

There are three divisions: Novice, Advanced and Youth (open to photographers 17 years of age or younger, as of the entry deadline). To be eligible, subject matter must be native to Florida, images must not contain human components and must have been taken while complying with [NANPA ethical field practices](#).

Prize details and entry requirements will be posted on OAS' new website as soon as it is completed, but in the meantime, start shooting and preserving Florida's natural wonders! If you have questions, contact (407) 718-1977 or [mwilliams@cfl.rr.com](mailto:mwilliams@cfl.rr.com).

*Teresa Williams,  
Chertok Committee Chair*



Sunrise at Orlando Wetlands Park. Photo: Milton Heiberg



## Remembering Zora for Black History Month

The most famous scientist to grow up in Central Florida, since we consider anthropology a science, was Zora Neale Hurston of Eatonville.

PBS' *The American Experience* aired "Zora Neale Hurston: Claiming a Space" on January 17th. This film is available to watch online [at this link](#).

In the mid 1920s at Barnard, Zora studied under famous anthropologist Franz Boas who encouraged her to pursue her interest in African American culture and folklore. This opened doors to travel.

Her most famous novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, provided insight into the experiences of Southern Black women.

Although relatively unknown at her death in 1960, Zora was an important female voice in the largely male literary world of the Harlem Renaissance.

Watch this biography and learn about this intriguing and significant local anthropologist.

## Birding/Biking Field Trip February 12, 2023

On Sunday, February 12th, Alan Shapiro of Orange Audubon Society and Pete Johnson of Duval Audubon Society will lead a Limited Edition Cycling Field Trip to the Lake Apopka North Shore, Clay Island area.

This is an opportunity to bike through areas closed to motor vehicles. We plan to cycle 6-8 miles at an easy pace with many stops to view the wildlife along the way.

You must provide your own bicycle. Limited Edition Field Trips are limited to 12 people. Cost per trip is \$12 for members and \$17 for non-members. To reserve a spot email Kathy at [riglingkathy@gmail.com](mailto:riglingkathy@gmail.com). Join us for a fun trip.

## Education Coordinator Update

In January, I held my first Girl Scout program at Orlando Wetlands Park, assisting the girls on their habitat badge. I first read them *On Meadowview Street*, a story about how a little girl gets her family to improve their habitat at home. Then the children played a game about the components of habitat. Afterwards we hiked out into the wetlands onto the new boardwalk. The girls were very engaged looking for different parts of the habitat on a scavenger hunt.

I also presented all day at Timber Lakes Elementary School, starting with the Green Club before school. On their school grounds we studied bird behavior. The highlight was seeing numerous Killdeer feeding on the field and finding their tracks. Then I did a program for the entire fourth grade on how to set up an outdoor learning space with habitat improvements, including how to attract birds and other wildlife to their campus. Next, I did some classroom programs for the whole second grade who are also going to do a wildlife garden. I read to them and shared a PowerPoint on the components of habitat and how to attract birds and pollinators to their school garden. Throughout the day I led some nature walks for first grade classes. The children were especially excited to see the numerous Yellow-rumped Warblers feasting on Wax Myrtle berries.

My monthly online program for educators was on "Supporting Student Investigations" and is archived on Orange Audubon Society's YouTube channel at [this link](#). I also assisted the Florida Young Birders Club with their program by Ken Meyer about his research, [available at this link](#).

At Zellwood Elementary, I taught the students about winter birds of Florida. We then went out looking for winter birds and yearly residents in their schoolyard. The highlight was finding Yellow-bellied Sapsucker holes and talking about how the sap helps create food for many animals.

To schedule an educational visit for a school group, after-school group, scout troop or any other interested party, please email me at [education@orangeaudubonfl.org](mailto:education@orangeaudubonfl.org).

*Kathy Rigling, Education Coordinator*



Girl Scouts at Orlando Wetlands Park in game teaching about habitats. Photo: Kathy Rigling

## Beginners Bird Identification

The winter Beginners Bird Identification class, led by Susan Thome-Barrett and myself, started at Orlando Wetlands Park. After going over the basics of bird identification, safety tips and binocular use, we headed out into the wetlands. An exciting find was an overwintering Magnolia Warbler! The class enjoyed Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, Blue-winged Teal and Roseate Spoonbills among the other wetlands inhabitants.

Our second session was at Oakland Nature Preserve with bird identification practice plus learning eBird. A highlight was seeing a Field Sparrow on the Red Trail.

Our final session was on the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive. Highlights were four very close Wilson Snipes, Black-necked Stilts, American Widgeon, Northern Shovelers, Black-crowned Night Herons and a Sora out in the open! If you missed this series, we'll start again next fall.

*Kathy Rigling*



Winter 2023 Beginners Bird Identification class. Photo: Kathy Rigling



## Year of the Bonaparte's Gull

The smallest gull seen over most of North America, the Bonaparte's Gull is tern-like in flight and recognizable in winter with a dark spot behind its ear. I see them each winter by boat on Lake Jesup during our Econlockhatchee Christmas Bird Count, but this year Bonaparte's Gulls have shown up on many smaller lakes and even in retention ponds.

The Bonaparte's Gull differs from our year-round resident Laughing Gull and from other gulls that winter here in eating more insects and crustaceans than fish. With its thin black bill, it picks aquatic invertebrates off the water surface. A really unusual thing about this species is that it nests in Canada and Alaska in coniferous trees, like spruce, tamarack, Douglas-fir, hemlock, or jack pine, near marshes. In the warmer months, these agile gulls capture emerging flying ants, termites, bees, and other aerial insects in flight. In breeding plumage, which we never see, they have black heads like breeding Laughing Gulls.



Above, Bonaparte's Gull in retention pond. Photo: Sam Mitcham. Bonaparte's Gull in retention pond. Photo: Joseph Mileyka

Bonapartes migrate south in flocks and can show up in almost any aquatic environment if migration is interrupted. Bad weather during migration may be why they are so dispersed this year.

They prefer floating to standing on the shore, so look for them floating buoyantly on the water. Take the opportunity to see this very cool little gull this winter! *Deborah Green*

## Black Skimmer: Another Declining Species

A fascinating seabird, Black Skimmers are noted for their odd call, unique bill, and agile foraging behavior. Larger than terns, adult birds are stark black above and white below. They have long wings, short legs, and an outsized red-and-black scissor-like bill. The lower mandible is longer than the upper one, an adaptation for catching small fish in shallow water. A foraging Skimmer flies low over water with its bill open and the lower mandible slicing the surface. When its bill touches a fish, the upper mandible instantly snaps to catch it. Since they find food by touch, not by sight, Skimmers often feed in the late evening or at night when waters are calmer and more prey are close to the surface. They eat many kinds of small fish and a few crustaceans such as shrimp or blue crab.

Highly social, this species nests in colonies, usually occupying the same site from year-to-year, if the colony is large and successful. Small or failed colonies will relocate. The birds lay eggs directly on sandy, shelly, or stony ground, and prefer islands or remote beaches with sparse vegetation. To create a nest, or scrape, they kick sand behind them with their feet and then rotate their bodies in the area to make a shallow saucer-shaped depression. (What a clever maneuver!) Often, they create several scrapes before eggs are laid.

Black Skimmers are highly vocal when their flocks are disturbed and during breeding or territorial encounters. A typical call is a distinctive soft, hollow nasal bark.

In serious decline, Black Skimmers are an Audubon priority bird, a species that is threatened in terms of its long-term survival. In the late 19th century, Black Skimmer eggs were harvested commercially and adults killed for their feathers. This led to a reduction of the Atlantic Coast population. While they have recovered somewhat since then, they are still sensitive to any disturbances of their nesting colonies.

The North American Breeding Bird Survey estimates that populations declined 4 percent per year between 1966 and 2015, indicating a cumulative loss of 87 percent of their population over that period. The North American Waterbird Conservation Plan lists Black Skimmers as a Species of High Concern. Since they nest on beaches where people like to vacation, Black Skimmers' are threatened by development and loss of nesting habitat. Skimmer nests also can be destroyed by roaming dogs and vehicles. Storms and high tides can swamp eggs or nestlings. In view of sea-level rise projections, the species faces further steep declines in its numbers—unless dedicated conservation management is implemented.

Common year-around on Florida's coasts, Skimmers nest near Redington Beach, Indian Shores, and Indian Rocks beaches, between St. Petersburg and Clearwater. You will marvel at their squat, elongated bodies standing guard over their darling nestlings and their quirky habit of sleeping prone on the sand. See them also at Black Point Wildlife Drive at the Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge in Titusville on our East Coast. It is a thrill to see them gracefully furrowing the water and snapping up prey with their knife-like mandibles. You will fall in love as I did with the amazing Black Skimmer. Check it out! Florida has many natural treasures to cherish. *Linda Carpenter*



Above, Feeding—Immature Black Skimmer. 2021 Chertok Photo Contest, First Place, Advanced Category. Photo: Mark Hainen. Below, Catch of the Day—Black Skimmer Chick. 2020 Chertok Photo Contest, Honorable Mention, Advanced Category. Photo: Bobby van Mierop

**Green PLACE Family Nature & Photography Hike, February 25, 2023**

Orange County Environmental Protection Division will offer a guided nature walk led by Beth Jackson, Green PLACE program Environmental Program Supervisor, and Lee Ann Posavad, experienced photographer. The walk is at Pine Lily Preserve, 1401 S County Road 13, Orlando, FL 32833, on February 25, 2023, from 9:00-11:30 a.m. Pine Lily encompasses 409 acres connecting directly to Hal Scott Preserve and Long Branch Preserve as part of a wildlife corridor. It is on the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Great Birding and Wildlife Trail system. Bring your binoculars and cameras to enjoy an early morning hike focusing on native species identification and nature photography. Open to all ages and hiking experience levels. FREE



Above, male Vermilion Flycatcher. Below, female Vermilion Flycatcher, Clay Island, Lake Apopka North Shore. Photos: Delsy Rodriguez

**Clay Island Field Trip**

On January 21st, Orange Audubon Society held a field trip to Clay Island on the Lake Apopka North Shore led by Kathy Rigling, Terry Breese and Larry Martin. The group was treated to a wonderful morning on the North Shore. The day was overcast, but we still had a great day birding.

The highlight was seeing the Vermilion Flycatchers. The male had more red in his plumage than a month ago. Some winter ducks were still present including Ring-necked Ducks, Blue-winged Teal. We saw Green Heron, Whistling-Ducks (Fulvous and Black-bellied), Savannah Sparrow, Yellow-rumped Warbler among other birds; White Ibis, Great Egret, Great Blue Heron. A Bald Eagle flew by. We walked about 2 miles at an easy pace, and everyone went home a little tired but happy with the experience.

*Delsy Rodriguez*

**FEBRUARY/MARCH CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

**Great Florida Riverway Reunion, Magnolia Park**

February 4, 2022  
Contact Deborah at [info@orangeaudubonfl.org](mailto:info@orangeaudubonfl.org)

**Birds of Prey Identification with Bob Sanders**

February 5, 2023  
Contact Teresa at [mwilliams@cfl.rr.com](mailto:mwilliams@cfl.rr.com)

**Sunrise Photo Shoot at Orlando Wetlands Park with Milton Heiberg**

February 5, 2023  
Contact Teresa at [mwilliams@cfl.rr.com](mailto:mwilliams@cfl.rr.com)

**Limited Edition Field Trip: Bird & Bike - Green Mtn to Clay Island**

February 12, 2023  
Contact Alan at [alangrandiflora@gmail.com](mailto:alangrandiflora@gmail.com)

**Great Backyard Bird Count**

February 17-20, 2023  
[gbbc.birdcount.org/](http://gbbc.birdcount.org/)

**Orlando Wetlands Festival**

February 18, 2023  
Contact Teresa at [mwilliams@cfl.rr.com](mailto:mwilliams@cfl.rr.com)

**Family Green PLACE Nature and Photography Hike at Pine Lily Preserve, Bithlo**

February 25, 2023  
Contact Beth at (407) 836-1481

**Birdathon and Leaders' Choice Trip**

March 4-5, 2023 (field trip on Mar 5)  
Contact Kathy at [riglingkathy@gmail.com](mailto:riglingkathy@gmail.com)

**Wekiwa Survey**, Wekiwa Springs State Park, Apopka  
March 11, 2023

Contact Kathy at [riglingkathy@gmail.com](mailto:riglingkathy@gmail.com)

**Buscando Pajaros**, Orlando Wetlands Park, Christmas  
March 11, 2023

Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

**Limited Edition Field Trip: PEAR Park, Lake County**  
March 12, 2023

Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

**Monthly Program: Plants for Birds by Jacqui Sulek**

March 16, 2023  
Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

**Little Big Econ State Forest, Oviedo, Field Trip**

March 18, 2023  
Contact Larry at (407) 252-1182

**Intermediate Bird Identification**

March 18 and 25, 2023  
Contact Bob Sanders at (407) 459-5617

**Costa Rica Birding with Wildside Nature Tours**

March 27-April 4, 2023  
Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

**SAVE THE DATES!**

**Kissimmee Prairie Preserve Limited Edition Field Trip**

April 15, 2023  
Contact Deborah at [info@orangeaudubonfl.org](mailto:info@orangeaudubonfl.org)

**Fort DeSoto Limited Edition Field Trip**

April 17-18, 2023  
Contact Kathy at [riglingkathy@gmail.com](mailto:riglingkathy@gmail.com)