



This Month's Program: **Free the Ocklawaha by Margaret Spontak** May 18, 2023

The Ocklawaha River, the largest tributary of the St. Johns River, has been impounded since 1968 by a dam built as part of the long-abandoned Cross Florida Barge Canal project.

The Rodman/Kirkpatrick Dam destroyed 7,500 acres of floodplain forest, 16 miles of river and submerged over 20 freshwater springs.

With the dam in need of millions of dollars of repairs, it is time to breach a portion of the Dam to recreate a free-flowing river — reconnecting Silver Springs, the Ocklawaha, and St. Johns Rivers.

Orange Audubon Society's (OAS) May speaker is Margaret Spontak. Her conservation career includes director of development for Audubon Florida, director of policy and planning for the St. Johns River Water Management

District, promotions manager for Silver Springs and Weeki Wachee and co-author of *Protecting Paradise*. She currently chairs the Free the Ocklawaha Coalition, representing 34 organizations including OAS.



On May 18th at 7 p.m., Margaret will share why removing the dam and restoring the historic flow will provide significant ecological benefits as well as expand recreational and economic opportunities and how we can help. Please join us! Location details below.

Paula Duenas, Programs Chair

Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive 8th Anniversary

In May 2015, the St. Johns River Water Management District opened the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive (LAWD). Orange Audubon Society appreciates having public access to the Lake Apopka North Shore wetlands and has been celebrating the anniversary of LAWD's opening each year.

On Sunday May 7th from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., volunteers will be stationed at the shelter by the pumphouse bridge. Come on out and ask your bird questions of our volunteer experts.

Email info@orangeaudubonfl.org if you have any questions.

Wetlands Issue

Wetlands Protection and Restoration became themes in this month's *OASis*. We start with Free the Ocklawaha to restore the Great Florida Riverway and celebrate public access to the Lake Apopka North Shore wetlands with OAS' 8th anniversary celebration (both p.1). We share good news of the return of nesting egrets to Egret Island (p.3), about a trip to Sweetwater Wetlands in Gainesville (p.7), the Kissimmee River Restoration (p.9) and our featured bird is the Black-necked Stilt (p.5). We encourage you to support Orange County's revision of its Wetlands Ordinance (p.3).



Green Heron in water lettuce, Photo: Brian Miller

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/



OAS*is*

Welcome Back

As the Orange Audubon Society (OAS) programs chair for many years before I became president, I was proud of how many of you came out each month for our monthly programs at Leu Gardens. Like other entities, we shut down in March 2020 when the pandemic hit. We soon learned how to provide programs remotely and archive them on a new [Orange Audubon Society YouTube channel](#).

Then Kathy Rigling, OAS' Education Coordinator, found "Bird Chats," a Zoom program put on by an Audubon nature center in upstate New York. Kathy, Susan Thome-Barrett, Jack Horton, Sam Mitcham and I started our own version of Bird Chats, with interesting guest speakers.

With an overabundance of enthusiasm, we hosted a new Bird Chat *every Thursday* except the 3rd Thursday, which was reserved for OAS' regular monthly programs. Over time we lost Jack and Sam due to work commitments but still use their great photos.

In the 2021-22 program season, OAS tried a few in-person programs at beautiful Leu Gardens featuring live animals, but attendance was poor. We resolved that we would restart monthly in-person programs in the 2022-23 season. Despite good publicity, turnout was still low, until last month's program.

Dr. Ken Meyer of the [Avian Research and Conservation Institute](#) has presented for OAS a half dozen times over the past 20 years and is our most popular speaker. We were thrilled that ninety-five people came out!

I thank each and every one of you who attended, which was appreciated by Dr. Meyer. Hoping that you come out also for the May 18th program to hear about freeing the Ocklawaha. Our presenter Margaret Spontak is driving in from Ocala to tell us about this cause that she is so passionate about and that she is so skillfully leading the coalition of groups that may finally accomplish a long-elusive goal.

And then I ask that you come out for our last program of the season on June 15th, the awards program for our annual Chertok Florida Native Nature Photo Contest. OAS treasurer



Above, Dr. Ken Meyer talking about two rare raptors he studies. Middle and below, the crowd on April 20th. Photos: Deborah Green

and Chertok contest chair Teresa Williams works hard to coordinate the screening and judging, with 3 different judges each year, and to coordinate prizes and all details of the annual event, now in its 35th year. The Youth category is particularly fun to watch, with the young winners so thrilled to have their work recognized.

The in-person annual Silent Auction was an anticipated event. OAS' auction will be held online again this year through the easy to use Bidding Owl platform. Items are still being collected, and bidding will start June 8th. More details will be shared in the June *OASis*. Thanks again for your participation in OAS' programs!!

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.

For other membership information, contact: membership@orangeaudubonfl.org

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Egret Island Revives

As we approached Egret Island in our boat, we were passed by jet skis buzzing and circling near the shore. Loud dance music with a heavy beat emanated from the sandy shallow water to the northwest, where more than 30 boats were parked. It was the spring of 2019 and we had come to check the status of the rookery on the eastern shoreline of this mostly submerged island. Historically this had been a significant site for nesting wading birds, predominately Great Egrets. But in recent years, the noise from party boats close to the shoreline has reduced the number of birds. All that we found were a handful of Brown Pelicans and Anhingas nesting.

Fast forward to late March 2023 and what a surprise! The eastern shore was once again filled with nesting wading birds. They were mostly Great Egrets, a few Double-crested Cormorants, Brown Pelicans, Anhingas, and others. About half of the Great Egrets were on nests. In our circumnavigation, we counted 127 birds. There were numerous chicks, some just little puff balls, and others about half the size of their parents. The egrets are back on Egret Island!

It has probably been 15-20 years since we have seen a significant rookery on the island. What was different this year? Well, it just so happens that the public boat ramps, managed by the Orange County Parks Department, were closed September 30, 2022 through March 21, 2023. The closures were in response to the two hurricanes that came through Central Florida, leaving the water levels in the Butler Chain extremely high and many docks damaged. This nearly 6-month closure of public boat ramps during nesting season was unprecedented. Limited access resulted in less human activity, fewer boats and less noise.

Egret Island is owned by Florida Audubon Society and located in northeast portion of Lake Butler. If you have a boat, you can access the nesting area on the eastern shore via the public boat ramp at RD Keene Park, 10900 Chase Rd, Windermere, FL 34786.

Lorraine Burch, OAS member



Editor's note: Charles Lee of Audubon Florida worked with Orange County last year to secure passage of a boat mooring exclusion zone that would keep people off of Egret Island. Many boaters came out to oppose it, but the commissioners sided with environmentalists wanting to protect birds on the island. Before this exclusion zone even went into effect and had to be enforced, this hurricane-induced boat ramp closure accomplished the same objective!

Charles cited John Storer's observations of tens of thousands of nesting Great Egrets on Egret Island in the 1940s that occurred prior to construction of drainage canals that lowered the level of the Butler Chain of Lakes. Taking the water out from under nests eliminates alligators that keep away raccoons and snakes that prey on the egrets. Lorraine clarified that all of the nesting she has seen has been in trees above water. Charles has been dealing with Egret Island for 40+ years while employed by Florida Audubon, and to his knowledge this is the only significant Great Egret nesting reported during that entire period.

This is clear evidence that exclusion of boats and people on the island is what is needed for the birds to be able to nest.



Views of Egret Island with nesting Great Egrets, Brown Pelicans, and Anhingas. Photos: Lorraine Burch

Orange County Wetlands Protection Ordinance Public Meetings

The Orange County Environmental Protection Division (EPD) is working on an update to its [Wetlands Ordinance](#) (Chapter 15, Article X, Conservation Areas Ordinance).

EPD will be hosting a series of stakeholder meetings on proposed conceptual Orange County wetland policy, which Orange Audubon Society's Conservation Committee and Charles Lee of Audubon Florida consider very positive.

If you wish to stay informed and provide feedback on the ordinance update initiative, please plan to attend one of these meetings.

The public meetings will occur on:

May 31st from 5:00pm - 7:00pm,

June 1st from 9:00am - 11:00am,

June 12th from 5:00pm - 7:00pm,

June 13th from 9:00am - 11:00am.

All are at the IFAS Extension offices, 6021 Conway Road, Orlando, FL 32812.

You may submit questions or comments via email to WetlandPermitting@ocfl.net.

Town of Oakland Declares World Migratory Bird Day

The Town of Oakland, established in 1887, is one of the oldest municipalities in Orange County. Proud of its tree cover, Oakland has been certified through the Arbor Day Foundation's Tree City USA program since 2003. The Oakland Nature Preserve is a partnership between the Town of Oakland and the Friends of Lake Apopka. With all that Oakland has done to preserve the local environment, Orange Audubon Society (OAS) was not surprised to receive the town manager's request to do a bird-friendly city proclamation.



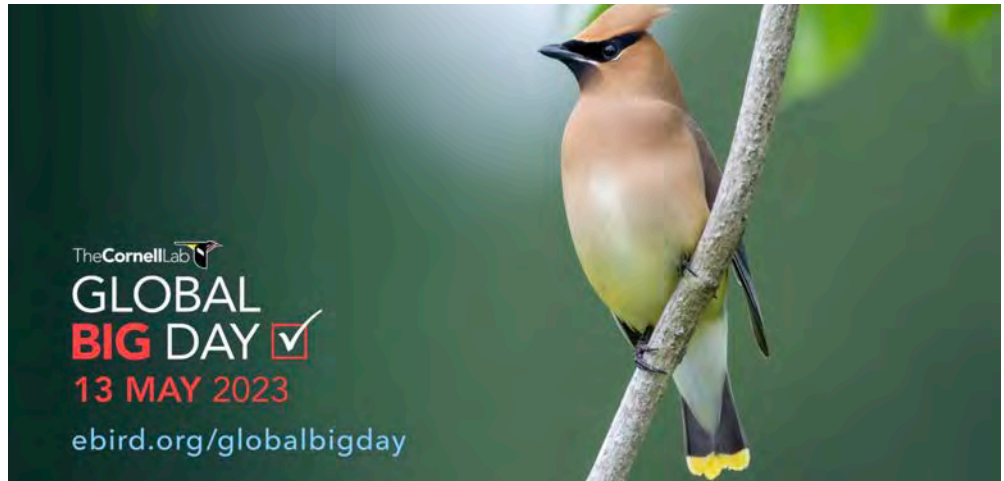
World Migratory Bird Day Proclamation at Town of Oakland. Photo: Alan Shapiro. Indian peafowl at Magnolia Park. Photo: Joe Mileyka

Models of Bird-friendly Community certification programs are few, but OAS found some and has passed information to Audubon Florida in hopes it will develop such a program statewide.

Pioneering this effort with OAS, the Town of Oakland did a Migratory Bird Day Proclamation on April 25th. Read by Mayor Kathy Stark, the proclamation included reference to the town's peacocks, of which many citizens are advocates since these beautiful birds have been in Oakland for a hundred years. They are admired by cyclists on the West Orange Trail.

The proclamation also references the town's nesting Bald Eagles, tree canopy, and bird migration. Thanks to the Town of Oakland for being a pioneer in bird protection.

Deborah Green



Global Big Day May 13, 2023

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has provided many fun opportunities for people to look for birds and provide valuable scientific data. More and more of our local naturalists use the [eBird Mobile app](https://ebird.org) on a frequent basis.

Cornell Lab's next special date in which people worldwide are encouraged to observe birds at their home, in their neighborhoods or local parks, will be May 13th. Global Big Day is an annual celebration of World Migratory Bird Day.

Spend at least 5 minutes observing and recording the birds you see at home and report your observations on eBird. If you don't have an eBird account it is free and easy to create one at ebird.org. By submitting data you are providing valuable information to help scientists in helping to protect diminishing bird populations.

Kathy Rigling

City Nature Challenge Wraps Up

A BioBlitz is an event that focuses on finding and identifying as many species as possible in a specific area over a short period of time. The City Nature Challenge, which started as a competition between San Francisco and Los Angeles, is now a worldwide event that uses the iNaturalist app. In our area The Nature Conservancy sponsors the City Nature Challenge, and Orange Audubon Society has co-sponsored along with some other entities. Did you participate? Results next month.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act

One of the country's first and most important wildlife conservation laws, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) of 1918 didn't happen without a lot of work. The MBTA, which is still in effect today, has saved billions of birds from senseless killing and likely prevented the extinction of entire bird species.

Senator George P. McLean is not a household name among birders. [Dr. Frank Chapman who started Christmas Bird Counts is much better known.](#) In fact, the only reason we now know about Senator McLean's work to get the MBTA passed is due to research by his great great nephew Will McLean Greeley.

George P. McLean, Birdman of the Senate

Author Will McLean Greeley became curious about the mysterious pride his family had about the name McLean when at a family reunion he found that half the attendees had the middle name McLean. His book *A Connecticut Yankee Goes to Washington: George P. McLean, Birdman of the Senate* puts McLean's victory in getting the MBTA passed in the context of his distinguished forty-five-year career during a time of widespread corruption and political instability. Reading this book, which I was provided as a preview pdf, was a fascinating walk through U.S. political history of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Greeley will be presenting a Bird Chat on May 4th at 7pm. [Join the Bird Chats mailing list](#) to be sent the Zoom link.

Deborah Green

Mead Botanical Garden Spring Bird Walks

For the past 12 years, Orange Audubon Society has hosted free bird walks at Mead Botanical Garden in Winter Park each Saturday in April. This April was quieter than usual. Presumably with the good weather, the birds didn't stop at Mead but kept going to their breeding grounds. Highlights were Blackpoll, Magnolia, Black-throated Blue warblers along with Ovenbirds, Painted Bunting, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Brown Thrasher, Great-crested Flycatcher, Gray Catbird, Limpkin and Wood Ducks.



Mead Botanical Garden Spring Bird Walk. Photo: Linda Gaunt

At Mead we have located several nests and enjoy watching the youngsters grow each week. Most thrilling was the Swallow-tailed Kite nest, which had been seen for the first time last year. At one point, six kites were seen flying together. Birders have seen adults sitting on a nest, but no offspring so far.

The Red-shouldered Hawks produced two offspring. The Barred Owls also had two offspring, and we saw the parents teaching the young to feed on fish in the creek. The Pileated Woodpeckers also had two offspring, and we were able to watch the parents feeding and coaxing the youngsters to fledge. The Wood Duck had 3 ducklings. A Ruby-throated Hummingbird nest was found but no offspring seen.

Fall migration walks will be in October. Hope to see you then!

Larry Martin and Linda Gaunt

The Beautiful Black-necked Stilt

A slender, elegant shorebird with extraordinarily long red legs and a needle-like bill, Black-necked Stilts have a distinctive black-and-white plumage. They forage much of the day by wading through shallow water to capture amphibians, snails, and tiny fish and crustaceans. Larval mosquitoes, dragonflies, mayflies, crickets, grasshoppers, beetles, and tiny frogs and fish also are part of their diet. To capture prey they execute a quick peck or swing their bills from side-to-side in the water to skim invertebrates from the surface. Their delicate slow walk is conspicuous.



Black-necked Stilt with Damselfly nymph. Photo: Rob Bensko

Stilts occupy shallow wetlands with sparse vegetation such as salt ponds, flooded areas along rivers, salt marshes, shallow lagoons, mangrove swamps and mudflats, or sewage ponds, and agricultural areas. They nest on the ground, usually by making a scrape, or small depression, on small islands or a clump of vegetation. I have seen them at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge (MINWR) calmly standing guard over a nest full of large brownish eggs in the middle of an open mud flat. Both sexes help to build the nest; one observes while the other wriggles into the dirt or sand to form an indentation about two inches deep. To line the nest they harvest available materials such as grasses, shells, mud chips, pebbles and bones. Both sexes participate in incubation and rearing of the chicks. Nesting adults are highly territorial and will defend their nest site with aggressive wing flapping and loud yapping calls. They have been known to strike curious humans from behind with their legs if humans get too close—so beware!

In North America, populations of Black-Necked Stilts were stable between 1966 and 2015. Since the North American Breeding Bird Survey estimates the global breeding population to be 900,000, conservation groups are not highly concerned about their survival. The Hawaiian subspecies of Stilt, however, is federally endangered, and there are fewer than 2,000 individual breeding birds. Since stilts are wetland birds, they are highly vulnerable to wetland destruction, degradation and pollution.

How to find this enchanting species? Visit mudflats, salt marshes, and flooded fields and listen for their frequent calling during nesting season. In early April birders reported seeing many Black-necked Stilts on Bio Lab Road and Blackpoint Wildlife Drive (MINWR) in Brevard County. Check it out! What a beautiful shorebird to add to your life list! Florida has abundant remarkable avian species.

Linda Carpenter

Central Florida Earth Day

Orange Audubon Society again had its outreach at Central Florida Earth Day at Lake Eola. Thanks to Rick Baird who did set up, take down, and stayed the whole day, as he has for many years, and to Emma Aagard, Fabiana Antezana, Ash Coleman, Marian Lichter and Sonia Stephens for joining Rick doing outreach. We appreciate the Earth Day organizers giving us our great spot along the lake each year.



OAS tent at the 2023 Central Florida Earth Day. Photo: Emma Aagard

Costa Rica with Wildside Nature Tours

Eight participants enjoyed a birding tour of Costa Rica with Wildside Nature Tours coordinated by Orange Audubon Society. The trip was 9 days in length, including travel days.

Our guide Glenn Crawford has been with Wildside for over 25 years and hails from Belize where he also leads guided tours. Glenn has an incredible ear and eye for movement, allowing him to locate birds despite how hidden they may be. At the end of each day, before dinner, the group reviewed and logged the different species seen or heard for that day. We saw over 250 species.

On our many rides to and from hotels or to birding spots, if anyone sighted an interesting bird, our driver Johnny and Glenn tried to accommodate us by pulling over when safely possible. And, Glenn did a great job identifying flyovers. The map below shows the two sections of Costa Rica that we visited. *From travelogue by Flo and Bob Sena*



Left, Resplendent Quetzal, male. Photo: Robert Sena. Above, the group and Paula with Morpho butterfly. Photos: Paula Duenas. Our guide Glenn Crawford at the high altitude hawk migration site. Swainson's Hawk. Photos: Robert Sena.

Editor's Note: We will provide more details on this Costa Rica trip in an upcoming Bird Chat.

Several participants are interested in going on a Wildside trip to Belize with Glenn next year. If this is of interest to you, email info@orangeaudubonfl.org.

Fort DeSoto Trip

Orange Audubon Society had a wonderful overnight field trip to Fort DeSoto Park on April 17th and 18th.

The trip was led by Lori and Jerry Mathis, and we observed 81 species over the two days.

Gorgeous Scarlet Tanagers, Blue Grosbeaks, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and Indigo Buntings were seen throughout the park. The fruiting trees also attracted beautiful Baltimore and Orchard Orioles. Warblers were a bit more difficult to locate, but we did find a very elusive Nashville Warbler at the Ranger's residence and a flitty Tennessee Warbler near East Beach. Prairie, Black-and-white, Worm-eating and Palm Warblers were in abundance.



Lori Mathis leading group at Fort DeSoto, Photo: Brian Miller.

On North Beach, we had great looks at Snowy, Piping, Wilson's and Semi-palmated Plovers. There were also Red Knots, Black-bellied Plovers, Reddish Egrets, Short-billed Dowitchers and Dunlins.

On the wires by the fort, we observed Gray Kingbirds and we watched an Eastern Kingbird hunting at the end of East Beach.

As we walked down the trail at Arrowhead Beach, suddenly an Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake started loudly rattling. Jerry is a snake expert and had us safely observe the rattler from a distance.

The weather cooperated and a great time was had by all.

Kathy Rigling

Young Birders Club

On April 22nd, young birders from Orange Audubon Society (OAS) joined other young birders from throughout Florida for the 2nd Florida Young Birders joint field trip. This trip was to Sweetwater Wetlands Park in Gainesville and led by Kate Milutin of St. John's Audubon Society, myself for OAS and three very enthusiastic members of the University of Florida's GREBE Chapter, Anna Mavrodieva, Cate Hancock and Bella Gonzalez. We explored this well-designed advanced stormwater treatment system that protects Paynes Prairie from urban runoff.

Highlights included seeing a King Rail and Sora out in the open on the boardwalk, a noisy flock of newly arrived Bobolinks feeding in the grasses, singing Marsh Wrens and Gray Catbirds, very active Spotted Sandpipers and a close flyover of a dark morph Short-tailed Hawk!

The next Young Birders field trip will be May 6th to visit a Purple Martin banding station on Lake Minnehaha in Clermont. Young Birders trips are open to young people ages 8 to 17, accompanied by a parent. To learn more or to register, email education@orangeaudubonfl.org.

Kathy Rigling

Education Coordinator Update

Orange County teachers have been taking advantage of Orange Audubon Society (OAS) educational programs now while they are teaching lessons related to ecology. Since the end of March, I have visited 12 Orange County Public Schools, including 10 elementary, one middle and a high school, a total of 66 classrooms. Including interactive displays at two science nights and one Earth Day Expo at local schools, I interacted with 1553 students. OAS also has had programs with the Citrus Council of Girl Scouts and the Orange County 4H Explorers.

Programs have included bird beak adaptations, food webs and food chains, components of habitat and the challenges of bird migration. We have had the opportunity to use our new KOWA binoculars, purchased through the National Audubon Collaborative Grant, with bird counts at elementary schools, as well as birding programs with the Florida Young Birders Club.

Through OAS' partnership with Mead Botanical Garden, I was invited to present for the Mead Life Explorers program (adults) about the birds of Mead Botanical Garden, why Mead is a migration trap and conservation tips to help birds. Afterwards, we did a special tour for some residents of Westminster Towers to look at the birds found at Mead.



Top, Dommerich Elementary students trying out OAS' new binoculars. Bottom, At Mead Botanical Garden, following Kathy Rigling's Life Explorer's talk, participants from Westminster Towers looked for birds on the boardwalk using OAS' new binoculars. Photos: Kathy Rigling

This month's educational zoom was about the [City Nature Challenge](#).

My monthly visit to the Zellwood Elementary School Birding Club included an interactive game to teach the students about the challenges of migration and then a bird walk to observe the local and migrant birds. They were excited to see their first Chimney Swifts and to see a Bald Eagle (their school mascot) perched in a nearby pine tree. For Zellwood Elementary a set of binoculars was donated by OAS to the participating teacher through OAS' FLEDJE grant. The students are gaining confidence in using binoculars and in identifying birds.

At Career Day at Eccleston Elementary School, I showed photos of the Zellwood Elementary students birding. Students at that school were very interested in also having a birding club.

To schedule an educational visit for a school group, after school group, scout troop or any other interested party, please email education@orangeaudubonfl.org.

*Kathy Rigling, OAS
Education Coordinator*



Young Birders Club exploring Sweetwater Wetlands. Photos: Kathy Rigling.

**Baby Owl Shower
May 13, 2023**

Each spring Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland hosts its Baby Owl Shower to raise funds to offset increased costs incurred during baby season.

Baby season is the busiest season for bird care, with the Center sometimes caring for over 100 young birds in May alone, tripling bird care costs.

Your absolute best opportunity to visit the Center is on [Baby Owl Shower Day](#), which will be Saturday, May 13th this year. The Center, located at 1101 Audubon Way, Maitland, FL 32751, will be open from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. to show off the baby owls and other



Baby Owl Shower

raptors. Admission is free if you bring an item from the Center's [Wish List](#).

Orange Audubon Society will have nature merchandise for sale. If you'd like to help, contact Teresa at mwilliams@cfl.rr.com.

We hope to see you there!

Orange Audubon Society Elections

The Orange Audubon Society (OAS) annual elections were held before the April 20, 2023 program at Leu Gardens. Officers are elected every two years with the next election in April 2024. This election confirmed renewed board terms for Marian Lichtler and Alan Shapiro.

A new board member voted in is David Bottomley who has volunteered for OAS by videotaping our monthly programs for several years. David is very interested in Birdability, a term for handicap accessibility of parks and preserves, and will be on OAS' Equity, Diversity and Inclusion committee as well as our Conservation committee.

If you wish to give back to your community through the conservation and nature education initiatives of OAS, contact me at lgaunt246@gmail.com.

Linda Gaunt, Nominating Chair



Florida Scrub-Jay. Photo: Joseph Mileyka

Join the Jay Watch Program

The Florida Scrub-Jay is our state's only endemic bird species, found nowhere else in the world.

It was listed as federally Threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under the Endangered Species Act in 1987, due to loss of its native scrub habitat and decades of fire suppression that allowed the scrub to become overgrown and unsuitable for Scrub-Jays.

Audubon Florida (AF) coordinates the Jay Watch community science program statewide. AF trains and supports volunteers to conduct scientific surveys that measure annual nesting success and count the total number of Florida Scrub-Jays at more than 45 sites in 19 counties.

Contact Audubon Florida's Jacqui Sulek for more information about the program and required trainings. Email jacqui.sulek@audubon.org.

LAWD Volunteers Needed

The Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive (LAWD) Ambassador Program is an Orange Audubon Society program in coordination with the St. Johns River Water Management District. By volunteering Saturdays and Sunday, the Ambassadors help keep the large number of LAWD visitors touring without incident. Email volunteer@orangeaudubonfl.org to find out more. Requirement: That you know and love LAWD and wish to share.

**Mary Anne Freyer
1940-2023**

Mary Anne Freyer passed away on March 18, 2023 at age 82. She was a gardener, photographer, birder, hiker and trail builder with the Florida Trail Association. She served as Orange Audubon Society secretary from 2005-2008.

Mary Anne grew up in Corpus Christi, Texas and moved to Orlando in 1964. She taught science at Glenridge Junior High and Edgewater



High School for 30 years and subbed at Edgewater for another 10 years.

Besides the many students she inspired to learn more about the environment, her most enduring achievement was developing the nature program at the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs' Wekiva Youth Camp, where she served as director for 9 years.

Rest in peace, dear friend.

Kayak Trip

On May 6th, Orange Audubon Society will hold a kayak/ canoe trip down the Wekiva River. Come explore this designated Wild and Scenic River with us as we search for breeding birds such as Prothonotary Warblers. The cost is \$12 for members and \$17 for nonmembers with an extra fee for kayak/ canoe rental or launch fees if you bring your own. To reserve a spot email riglingkathy@gmail.com.



Prothonotary Warbler. Photo: Kathy Rigling

Kissimmee Prairie Trip

Orange Audubon Society's (OAS) first trip to Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park in Okeechobee County took us on a tour on the park's swamp buggies, led by Catie Welch. Catie, who was park biologist at Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park from 2019 until recently, and her replacement Karina Nieves were our guides. We saw 41 species as a group and some participants saw Burrowing Owls on the way out.



Crested Caracara, Northern Bobwhite, Eastern Meadowlark. Photos: Brian Miller. Group at the Kissimmee. Photo: Deborah Green

This is a unique and beautiful state park preserving the dry prairie habitat.



Greater Yellowlegs and Least Sandpipers in wetlands of oxbow of the Kissimmee River, Photos: Brian Miller.

If you missed the trip this year but would be interested in doing it next year, email info@orangeaudubonfl.org. Gauging interest helps us plan. Thanks.

Kissimmee River Restoration

OAS' Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park tour took us to an oxbow of the Kissimmee River west of the Preserve, and we learned that the Kissimmee River restoration project is now complete.

The Kissimmee River once meandered for 103 miles through central Florida from Lake Kissimmee to Lake Okeechobee. Its floodplain, reaching up to 3 miles wide, was inundated for long periods by heavy seasonal rains. Native wetland plants, wading birds and fish thrived.

However prolonged flooding after a intense and long-lived September 1947 hurricane prompted a cry for federal assistance to reduce property damage. In 1948, Congress authorized the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to construct the Central and South Florida Project, engineering changes to deepen, straighten and widen the waterway.

In the 1960s, the Kissimmee River was channelized by cutting and dredging a 30-foot-deep straightaway through the river's meanders, named the C-38 canal.

While the project delivered on the promise of flood protection, it also destroyed much of a floodplain-dependent ecosystem that nurtured threatened and endangered species, as well as hundreds of other native fish and wetland-dependent animals. The waterway became oxygen-depleted, and the fish community it supported dramatically changed.

Over the past 20 years, restoration

has been accomplished through a 50-50 partnership between the USACE and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD). The first step was purchasing back land along the canal that had passed into private hands and was being ranched. More than 100,000 acres had to be acquired to restore the river and floodplain.

Backfilled canals, now reconnected and restored, flow in remnant river channels. Since the project began in 1999, nearly 20,000 acres of drained floodplain has been converted back to ecologically beneficial wetlands. More than 44 miles of the historic river channel have been restored.



Boat Trip on the Kissimmee?

Part of Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, [the Riverwoods Field Laboratory](#) is home to research and educational activities related to the restoration of the Kissimmee River.

Riverwoods offers 3-hour boat tours explaining all about the Kissimmee River Restoration. Riverwoods is about 2 hours south of Orlando. If you would be interested in doing such a trip next year, email info@orangeaudubonfl.org. Gauging interest helps us plan. Thanks.

Deborah Green

June Challenge 2023

Are you wondering how to spend the slow birding month of June? Consider joining the June Challenge. It begins on Thursday, June 1st and extends through the month. Each birder picks a county, any county in the state, and tries to compile the biggest list of species for that area during the month. This friendly competition came out of Alachua Audubon, and Orange Audubon Society has been celebrating it for several years.

All native birds are countable and follow the [American Birding Association \(ABA\) checklist](#). If your local population of an exotic species is recognized as established by the ABA,

then any member of that population is ABA-countable. Otherwise put it on your non-countable list. For instance, established populations of Monk Parakeets are ABA-countable. An escaped Monk Parakeet or a Mute Swan at Lake Eola is not. List your ABA countable species first, and then your non-native non-ABA birds.

An important twist for the June Challenge is that you must see the bird, not just hear it.

June Challenge Trip

Get a head start on your June Challenge list by participating in our June Challenge field trip at Orlando Wetlands Park on Saturday, June 3rd, with Lori Mathis and me. To register



Mute Swan with cygnets at Lake Eola seen during Earth Day. This individual is not ABA-countable. Photo: Emma Aagard

email riglingkathy@gmail.com.

Kathy Rigling

MAY/JUNE CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Chats with OAS via Zoom

Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

- Connecticut Yankee (1918 Migratory Bird Act) by Will McLean Greeley

May 4, 2023

- Scrub-Jays, Gopher Tortoises and Manatees: Wildlife of Blue Spring State Park by Connor Wagner

May 11, 2023

- Birding Coastal South Carolina by Craig Watson

June 1, 2023

- Audio Discussion with David Simpson, Alex Lamoreaux and Natasza Fontaine

June 22, 2023.

- Osprey Conservation by Mike Drew

June 29, 2023

Bird & Kayak/Canoe Wekiva Island, Orange County, Limited Edition Field Trip

May 6, 2023

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Young Birders Trip to Purple Martin Banding

May 6, 2023

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive, 8th Anniversary

May 7, 2023

Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

Baby Owl Shower, Center for Birds of Prey, Maitland

May 13, 2023

Contact Teresa at (407) 718-1977

Wekiwa Survey

May 13, 2023

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

World Migratory Bird Day/Global Big Day

May 13, 2023

Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

Monthly Program: Free the Ocklawaha by Margaret Spontak

May 18, 2023

Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

Jay Watch Training

May 2023

fl.audubon.org/get-involved/jay-watch

June Challenge Kickoff, Orlando Wetlands Park

June 3, 2023

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Wekiwa Survey

June 4, 2023

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Oakland Nature Preserve Survey

June 10, 2023

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

OAS Online Auction

Jun 8, 2023 noon–Jun 19, 2023 7 PM

www.biddingowl.com/OrangeAudubonSociety

35th Annual Chertok Nature Photography Contest Awards Program with Online Auction by Teresa Williams

June 15, 2023

Contact Teresa at (407) 718-1977

June Challenge Bird Walk and Top Birder Celebration

June 24, 2023

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com