



Kissimmee River Restoration. Photo: South Florida Water Management District

This Month's Program November 16, 2023

Kissimmee River Restoration by Amber Moore

In pre-settlement times, the Kissimmee River flowed south into Lake Okeechobee, which spilled south into the Everglades. It was a winding river with wetlands and a chain of more than two dozen lakes, full of habitat for wading birds and other wildlife. A major hurricane in 1947 that caused flooding led to the channelization of the river by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in the 1960s. The meandering river was converted to a 30-foot-deep straightaway, called the C-38 Canal.

But already by the 1970s, Lake Okeechobee became polluted and its overflowing water had to be shunted to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers. Environmentalists began lobbying for restoration of the Kissimmee River. The project finally began in 1992 and has recently been declared complete.

The Riverwoods Field Lab, between the towns of Okeechobee and Sebring, is part of Florida Atlantic University and is a center of research and education on the Kissimmee River. Amber Moore, director of Riverwoods, is Orange Audubon's speaker on November 16th and will share with us details of the restoration, which is lauded as the largest and most successful in the world.

Join us November 16th at 7 p.m. for a fascinating program. Location below

Alan Shapiro, Programs Chair

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 October and 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/



Green PLACE Nature & Photography Hike November 4, 2023

Orange Audubon Society (OAS) is offering a FREE guided Nature & Photography Hike on Saturday, November 4, 2023 at Isle of Pine Preserve in east Orange County. Beth Jackson, naturalist and Orange County Green PLACE manager, and Lee Ann Posavad, wildlife photographer, will co-lead this hike, ideal for youth and families. Through the long-standing partnership between OAS and the Green PLACE program in promotion of these preserves, this is your opportunity to learn about the nature of this 464-acre Orange County Green PLACE property

Join us November 4th, 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. at Isle of Pine Preserve, 14032 Lacebark Pine Rd, Orlando, FL 32832. The trip is free but limited in number of participants. To reserve your spot, call Beth Jackson at (407) 836-1481 or email GreenPLACE@ocfl.net.

Bird & Bike, Lake Apopka Loop Trail November 4, 2023

Orange Audubon Society's November Limited Edition Field Trip is Bird & Bike on the Lake Apopka Loop Trail. Join Alan Shapiro and Pete Johnson at Magnolia Park, by the EcoEducation Center, at 8:00 a.m. and pedal through beautiful parts of the North Shore inaccessible by car.

We will see many bird species and possibly otters, alligators and bobcats. Bring your own bike, but not a skinny-tired bike because roads are packed limerock and somewhat bumpy. Pedal-assist bicycles are acceptable. Bring water, sunscreen, bug spray, a snack, a hat, binoculars, camera for a 3-4 hour bike ride, going slow and stopping frequently.

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 contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com.



**Orange County Wetlands Ordinance:
Adoption Date is December 12, 2023**

On December 12th, the final draft of a new Wetlands Ordinance will be presented to the Orange County Commissioners for a final vote.

Orange County's current Wetlands Ordinance dates back to 1987 (35 years ago) and needed updating to address wetland loss. Audubon Florida's Charles Lee provided input, and Orange Audubon Society's (OAS) conservation committee has sent comments. Members have spoken at Commission meetings, particularly in support of the 100 foot buffer to new development impacting wetlands.

Currently, the Environmental Protection Division (EPD) is finalizing the draft ordinance and presenting it to pertinent Orange County Advisory Boards (Zoning, Environmental Protection, Sustainability, etc.). Updates to the ordinance are to:

- Identify and Protect priority wetlands and surface waters
- Balance wetlands protections with property rights
- Make processes more streamlined, predictable and consistent
- Make the ordinance easier to understand

Will you join members of the OAS Conservation Committee at the County Admin Building on December 12th in support of EPD's work toward better wetland protection? Contact me at 2904susan@gmail.com to let us know you will join us and if you have any questions. Thank you!

Susan Thome-Barrett, Conservation Committee Co-chair

What's new at the Orlando Wetlands?

It's been almost one year since the City of Orlando opened the over-water boardwalk at the Orlando Wetlands, and the overall reception has been outstanding!

While we've seen a steady increase in annual visitorship over the past few years, the boardwalk brought in a wave of new visitors that exceeded all expectations. So far this year, number of visitors has been up by 150%.

You may have noticed some major changes recently at the Orlando Wetlands. The first is the removal of the word "park" from our name.

This was done to focus attention on our primary function as an advanced water reclamation facility under the City of Orlando's Water Reclamation Division.

The name change better aligns with our goal to educate the community on how we treat and manage wastewater in an efficient and environmentally responsible way. The change will also help to remove any false expectations that the Orlando Wetlands is operated and managed as a facility under the City's Parks and Recreation Division, which it is not.

Another significant change is that the Orlando Wetlands is now closed on Mondays. This includes all holidays that fall on Mondays as well. Why, you may ask? The answer is twofold: So that staff can work and operate equipment in the wetlands without impeding the safety and enjoyment of visitors, and to give the wildlife and infrastructure a reprieve from the increasing visitor traffic.

By making these changes, we aim to continue maintaining a functioning wetland that 1) treats reclaimed water per Florida Department of Environmental Protection requirements, 2) creates viable and diverse wetland habitat, and 3) provides public education and recreation opportunities.

To the long-time visitors and supporters - thank you for understanding, adjusting, and growing with us! And for those new to the [Orlando Wetlands](#) - come learn more of what we're all about. I'm sure you'll be amazed!

Rachel Kessler, Public Outreach Coordinator for the Orlando Wetlands



Boardwalk at Orlando Wetlands. Photo: City of Orlando



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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**Progress on the Arctic
More Comments Needed**

Those of us who sent in comments towards protection of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) can be happy that our voices were heard. On September 6th, the Department of the Interior canceled remaining leases for oil and gas drilling inside ANWR.



Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Map: Audubon Alaska

Additionally, the Administration has announced two proposed conservation measures that would increase protections for ecologically sensitive landscapes across the American Arctic, including ANWR and the 23-million-acre National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A). The latter, known as the Western Arctic, is home to five “Special Areas”—the Utukok Uplands, Kasegaluk Lagoon, Colville River, Peard Bay, and Teshekpuk Lake. Teshekpuk Lake in particular teems with birds and is one of the most ecologically important wetlands in the entire Arctic.



National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. Map: Audubon Alaska

Join the mailing list of [Audubon Alaska](#) to be informed of how to keep sending comments.

Egret Island

Last May Orange County passed an Ordinance establishing “swim-only” and “vessel-exclusion” zones around Audubon Florida’s Egret Island in Lake Butler. This was done in response to noise, boat traffic and several deaths as the water’s around the bird sanctuary had become a party-boaters haven. Signage has been installed which will hopefully reduce the traffic to the island and prevent trespassing.

Christmas Bird Counts


The Christmas Bird Count began in 1900 as an alternative to a tradition of seeing how many birds or other animals hunters could shoot. The first Christmas bird census was held Christmas Day 1900, initiated by ornithologist Frank Chapman. Orange Audubon Society (OAS) hosted a Bird Chat about Frank Chapman, [see link](#).

Twenty-seven birders participated in that first count and tallied 90 species. Since that time Christmas Bird Counts have provided valuable data about the status of bird species, which helps to inform conservation priorities and decisions.

Each year Christmas Bird Counts are held from December 14th through January 5th. Going on counts is a great way to experience a variety of habitats with skilled birders. Listed on page 8 are the Christmas Bird Counts in our area and even if you are traveling, you can find out about [counts in other areas here](#). To join, email the compiler with your contact information and your birding experience level.



Birders on Christmas Bird Count. Photo: Deborah Green



ENERGY EFFICIENCY CLINIC


Saturday November 4, 2023
10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Callahan Neighborhood Center
101 N. Parramore Ave #1713 Orlando FL, 32801

DISCOVER WAYS TO REDUCE YOUR ENERGY COSTS!







- ➔ Expert advice on ways to make your home more energy-efficient and lower your bill
- ➔ On-site community navigators will help you through the application process for energy assistance programs.
- ➔ Free snacks and refreshments.

Participate for a chance to win exciting prizes!



←

Scan here or visit bit.ly/-Energy-Clinic to register.

Education Coordinator Update

As we move into the fall season our requests for educational programming have increased greatly. First of all, Arbor Ridge K-8 school invited me to do a program on the Bald Eagle as part of an evening Bald Eagle event they did with parents and students in celebration of the Bald Eagle as their school mascot.

This month I've done several after school programs, including monthly after school birding clubs at Eccleston Elementary, Zellwood Elementary and Eustis Elementary. This month's theme was migration. The students learned about the reasons for migration and the great challenges that birds face. The students were so excited to use the newly purchased youth binoculars from KOWA. At Eccleston, the children were thrilled with very close looks of a beautiful, Red-shouldered Hawk that landed on a telephone pole, only a few feet away. After stopping their bird walk when it was time to go in one girl exclaimed "Is it over already?" Another little boy said, "Birds are good!"



Eccleston Elementary Birders Club. Photo: Kathy Rigling

At Zellwood the students were excited to see the newly arrived Palm Warblers feeding on the playground. At Eustis the students were fascinated to see migrating vultures, and they learned to differentiate Black and Turkey Vultures.

I also did an after-school program on trees for over 100 students for the Dommerich Elementary EcoGarden Club.

This month I hosted two different home school programs. This first one was for students studying the Junior Naturalist program. I took them on a hike at Wekiwa Springs State Park in which they observed the birds in several different habitats, and we discussed how the habitats were unique. During the hike we came

across some recently burned areas, and I discussed the natural role of fire on the land.

For the Wild and Free homeschool group, I did a program on fall migration at Mead Botanical Gardens. After playing a migration game and looking at a map and other visuals that helped to explain migration, the students were challenged to see how many birds they could find. They very excitedly found Palm Warblers, American Redstarts, Carolina Wrens and other songbirds.

Rounding out the month, I also staffed an interactive table at Kelly Park School for their Mad Scientist Night. The children used different common utensils to simulate bird beaks and try to pick up different types of food. They also enjoyed looking at the display of photos of central Florida birds to see what type of beak they have.

Our monthly free educational webinars will continue November 8th from 7:00-7:30 pm with a program about Project Feeder Watch from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's K-12 educational programs. The link to sign up is <http://eepurl.com/imGskM>

For more information on educational programs or to schedule a class or after-school club visit, please email education@orangeaudubonfl.org.

Kathy Rigling, Education Coordinator



Orange Audubon Society tent at Backyard Biodiversity Day 2023. Photo: Deborah Green

Backyard Biodiversity Day Volunteers Appreciated

Thanks to Alan Shapiro and Marian Lichtler for assisting me to staff Orange Audubon Society's (OAS) display at the Backyard Biodiversity Day on October 21st at Mead Botanical Garden. For the 8th year, this was a great event in which OAS supports the Tarflower Chapter, Florida Native Plant Society in their native plant promotion.

Deborah Green



The well-burned sandhill habitat at Wekiwa Springs State Park abounds with wildflowers and native grasses. Photo: Deborah Green

Joint Field Trip to Wekiwa Springs State Park November 18, 2023

Orange Audubon Society is pleased to be joining with the Tarflower Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society for a field trip to Wekiwa Springs State Park, which is known for its large areas of fire-maintained natural sandhill and pine flatwoods habitat.

Wekiwa is the crown jewel of the state park system with an impressive diversity of habitats and unique plants with a wide variety of birds. Join this special joint field trip in which you will observe the beautiful birdlife and animal life and the distinctive plant life as well.

In the well-burned sandhill habitat, many specialty species may be found including Brown-headed Nuthatch, Bachman's Sparrows, Red-headed Woodpeckers, Pine Warblers, Blue-headed Vireos, Carolina Chickadees, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Northern Bobwhite and Red-tailed Hawks. Other wildlife includes White-tailed deer, Sherman's Fox Squirrels, and Fence Lizards.

Our guides from the Tarflower Chapter will point out some of the native plant species that thrive here. Bring your cameras as you enjoy the beautiful landscapes here.

This trip is free but pre-registration is required by signing up on the OAS website. You are responsible for the regular park entry fee of \$6 for more than one person, \$4 for a single person. For questions, contact me at riglingkathy@gmail.com.

Kathy Rigling

Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts.

Rachel Carson



Top, Searching for Black Rails at the NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL. Photo: Craig Watson. Bottom, Black Rail. Photo: Heather Levy.

The Highly Secretive Black Rail

A tiny rail the size of a sparrow, the Black Rail spends its days in the tall grasses of fresh and saltwater marshes and wet meadows where it feeds on aquatic invertebrates and seeds of aquatic plants. It prefers habitats with slightly lower water levels (1.2 inches deep max) and areas with the least tidal activity. Many of its traditional breeding areas have been drained, developed and fragmented and now this species is further threatened by sea level rise. Its favored breeding areas allow less competition from other rail species but also put the Black Rail at greater risk from terrestrial predators such as raccoons and Great Blue Herons.

Chicks of other rail species are often mistaken for black rails because of their smaller size and black colors. Black Rails chicks do not have the distinctive “fuzziness” of other rail chicks. Black Rails have chestnut napes and white speckles that assist them in remaining hidden in dark areas beneath grasses.

For years, scientists heard the Black Rail’s “kick-ee-ker” calls but weren’t certain which rail was calling due to the species’ elusive nature. Its being dark, small and residing in a very difficult habitat has made surveys difficult. Birders are usually only able to hear this rail’s calls.

Wild Turkey: Any Time, Any Place

Abundant year-around throughout North America, Wild Turkeys are great fun to watch as they stride boldly around woodlands foraging for nuts and berries. And due to their enormous size and large numbers, they are not difficult to find. If you hike in Florida you are likely to cross paths with flocks of these oddly shaped, spectacular birds. Their long powerful legs, large fan-shaped tail and small, bare head on a long neck are unmistakable. Blackish-looking from a distance, they actually have beautiful metallic-iridescent feathers of green, rufous, brown, and white. Males have a tuft of coarse filaments hanging from their upper breast, sort of like a beard. When breeding they puff up their feathers and fill the air with exuberant gobbling. Both sexes have ample secondaries, or inner wings close to the body; these provide powerful wing beats for rapid take-off. So despite their bulky bodies, they can fly. They also can run up to 25 mph and—surprise—they can swim!



Wild Turkeys. Photo: Mary Keim.

Once in dramatic decline because of over-hunting and habitat loss, the species has recovered and now occurs in every state except Alaska. Restoration programs in the 1980s helped increase their numbers to 6.7 million today. Domestic (farmed) turkeys number around 420 million during the holidays.

In the early 1500s, European explorers brought home Wild Turkeys from Mexico, where native peoples had domesticated them centuries earlier. Maya rulers and Aztecs feasted on turkeys and Native Americans made arrows and clothing from their tail feathers. Because of their large size and rich taste the species became popular on European menus. And when English colonists settled on the Atlantic Coast, they brought domesticated turkeys with them. How to find this species? Rise early in the morning when turkey flocks are out foraging in fields and along roadsides. They aren’t shy! A friend recently found a pair wandering around his office lawn near the Orlando International Airport. And in April, birders saw one near the mulberry tree in Mead Botanical Garden. If you have a large yard near woods, you can attract them by planting nut bearing trees or berry trees.

Or visit feederwatch.org of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology for more food options. Check out the fascinating Wild Turkey! You will fall in love with this beauty!

Linda Carpenter

In 2020 the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) listed the species as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Partners in Flight estimates a global population of 52,000 with the USFWS estimating 355 to 815 breeding pairs from New Jersey to Florida.

Short to medium distance migrants, they fly south to Cuba and the Caribbean. They migrate at night and risk collision with structures.

We thank early environmentalists and federal staff for the 50-year old Endangered Species Act, which provides tools to save species like this.

Susan Thome-Barrett

LAWD Ambassadors Needed

The 3 1/2 year old Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive (LAWD) Ambassador Program could use reinforcements. To support the St. Johns River Water Management District, which keeps the North Shore (a lake restoration area) open for visitation although it is not staffed as a park, Orange Audubon Society (OAS) has stepped up.

LAWD has visitation averaging 150,000 people a year, and OAS’ Ambassadors keep things running smoothly by passing out maps and giving tips to first-time visitors. We serve in two shifts between 10 and 3 on Saturdays and Sundays. To find out more, email volunteer@orangeaudubonfl.org.



NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL

November 30-December 4, 2023

It is the fantastic trip leaders that make the NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL so popular with participants. The 50+ leaders take us on nearly 70 trips throughout Central Florida, including inaccessible parts of St. Johns River Water Management District's 20,000-acre Lake Apopka North Shore.

Read about the leaders here: <https://northshorebirdingfestival.com/>, check out the trips with slots remaining and register soon!

And don't forget the Friday and Saturday keynotes with delicious dinners. All very inexpensive and raising funds toward Orange Audubon Society's (OAS) nature center effort and related education programs, thanks to the generosity of our volunteer leaders, festival committee and other volunteers and sponsors.



Hope to see you at OAS' eighth annual festival, a fun five days!

Deborah Green, Festival Committee Chair

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Chats with OAS via Zoom

Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

- The Limpkin by Dana Bryan

October 26, 2023

- Roseate Spoonbills by Emily Johnson

November 2, 2023

- Wildlife Photography by Kirsten Hines

November 9, 2023

- No Bird Chat, Thanksgiving

November 23, 2023

- No Bird Chat, NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL

November 30, 2023

- Birds of Southeast Arizona by Mitch Walters

December 7, 2023

- No Bird Chat, Holiday Break

December 28, 2023

Limited Edition Field Trip: Bird & Bike, Lake Apopka Loop Trail

November 4, 2023

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com.

Green PLACE Nature & Photography Hike

November 4, 2023

Contact Beth at (407) 836-1481

Monthly Bird Survey at Wekiwa Springs State Park

November 11, 2023

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com.

November Program: Restoration of the Kissimmee River by Amber Moore

November 16, 2023

Contact Alan at alangrandiflora@gmail.com

Monthly Field Trip with Tarflower Chapter at Wekiwa Springs State Park

November 18, 2023

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com.

NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL, Lake Apopka

Nov 30-Dec 4, 2023

Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

Limited Edition Field Trip: St. Augustine Sparrow Quest

December 16, 2023

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com.

December Program: On YouTube LIVE, TBA

December 21, 2023

Contact Alan at alangrandiflora@gmail.com

Christmas Bird Counts

- Zellwood/Mt. Dora: Thursday, December 14, 2023.

Contact Gallus Quigley at gallusq@gmail.com

- Bay Lake: Saturday, December 16, 2023. Contact John Thomton at john.thomton@gmail.com

- Wekiva River: Saturday, December 16, 2023. Contact Jay Exum at jay.h.exum@gmail.com

- Kissimmee Valley: Sunday, December 17, 2023. Contact Chris Newton at dexterdevon68@gmail.com

- Econlockhatchee: Friday, December 22, 2023. Contact Lorne Malo at lornekmalo@gmail.com

- Clermont: Monday, January 1, 2024. Contact John Thomton at john.thomton@gmail.com