



Clockwise, left to right, Southeastern Sunflowers and sabal palms on the St. Johns River; Sandhill Cranes; Great Blue Heron in cypress; Reg with his kayak. Photos: Reg Garner

This Month's Program, January 18, 2024

Tips to Create Amazing Nature Photos by Reg Garner

The deadline for Orange Audubon Society's (OAS) 36th annual Chertok Florida Native Nature Photo Contest is approaching on April 18, 2024! As part of the buildup to the contest, OAS hosts its annual photo tips presentation.

Our presenter, Reg Garner, is a local professional photographer with a passion for capturing the beauty of nature with his camera. Reg's love for photography was inspired by his photographer father, who taught him the fundamentals of film cameras. As a young man, he attended a lecture and met Ansel Adams, the great landscape photographer, who had a profound influence on his photography. For years he has kayaked or boated into backwaters, particularly along the St. Johns River, photographing nature. His photos are displayed at area hospitals, local offices, and galleries. Reg is past president of the Orlando Camera Club and founded the Sanford Camera Club. He enjoys sharing photo tips, and, even if you are not a photographer, the view into his favorite places will be fascinating.

OAS will be back at Leu Gardens (address below). Although we hope to have a recording for OAS' [YouTube channel](#) for later viewing, we encourage you to join us in-person, so you can to ask Reg questions. It will be great to see you!

Alan Shapiro, Programs Chair

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

Programs are the 3rd Thursday of each month (Sept–June) at 7:00 p.m.

All but October and December (which are on YouTube LIVE) 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/



Birds of Prey Identification Trip January 14, 2024

On Sunday, January 14, 2024, Bob Sanders will teach a Birds of Prey Identification class on the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive from 7:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Bob is a popular trip leader and raptor expert. Before moving to Central Florida, he co-founded the Chimney Rock Hawk Watch in Martinsville, New Jersey.

A second class will be February 4, 2024. Price for each is \$12 (Audubon members) or \$17 (non-members). To reserve your spot, visit [our website](#) and if questions, email riglingkathy@gmail.com. Bob can be reached at (407) 459-5617.

PEAR Park Field Trip January 20, 2024

Orange Audubon Society's first monthly free field trip of 2024 will be to PEAR Park in Leesburg. This Lake County park on the Palatka River encompasses 318 acres with 8 distinctive ecosystems, some under active restoration. We will see wintering songbirds and raptors. Trip leaders are Gigi DelPizzo and Kathy Rigling. This field trip is free, but spots are limited to 15 participants. To reserve your spot, visit [our website](#).



Peregrine Falcon, photographed at the 2023 NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL on the Lake Apopka Wildlife. Photo: Andrina Vaness, drinimartini_photography



Positive Actions by Orange County

On December 12th, the new Wetlands Ordinance came before the Orange County Commissioners for a final vote. Orange Audubon Society's (OAS) conservation committee had provided stakeholder input throughout the two-year process of ordinance development, along with Audubon Florida's Charles Lee, the local Sierra Club chapter, Friends of Lake Apopka and other environmental groups. OAS was there to document the pride and excitement of both the Environmental Protection Division Wetlands Permitting staff and the Commissioners after the unanimous passage of this important ordinance.



Environmental Protection Division Wetlands Permitting staff and Commissioners with celebratory photo after unanimous passage of the new Wetlands ordinance. *Photo: Deborah Green*

An updated Tree Ordinance for new development passed September 12th, which was also positive. The staff member who spearheaded that ordinance taught the commissioners the meaning of "ecosystem services" of trees, an important concept.

Increased funding for the Green PLACE (county natural lands) program passed in 2021, and new properties are being strategically purchased. To prevent the Green PLACE program from remaining a well-kept secret, OAS co-sponsors a free family photo trip to one of the Green PLACE properties each fall and spring (See p. 3).

Orange County's future development blueprint, Vision 2050, is now in Tallahassee for the mandated state review by the Florida Department of Commerce, after county commissioners voted to move the document forward.

We have the ear of Orange County's elected officials and staff, but need more people on our conservation committee. Can you join us? Email Susan at conservation@orangeaudubonfl.org. Thank you!

State Legislative Session Begins

The Florida legislative session convenes on January 9, 2024 and ends 60 days later on March 8, 2024. Audubon Florida has policy staff in Tallahassee working hard on all issues of environmental concern, interfacing with legislators, including during pre-session committee weeks. The *Audubon Florida Advocate* newsletter is sent weekly during the legislative session (monthly most of the year). Please [sign up at this link](#) and respond to the calls for action, most of which will be closer to the end of session.

Buy Your State Park Pass Before January 13th

A 50% discount for Florida residents on park passes extends through January 13th. With the discount, the family annual state park pass costs \$60, plus tax, while individual annual passes cost \$30. Florida's four-time award winning state park system consists of 175 parks for you to explore, with regular admission averaging \$6 per car. Go to floridastateparks.org for more information and to purchase passes, or purchase them at your nearest state park, including Wekiwa Springs State Park.



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 OAS*is* (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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NorthLake Park Community School schoolyard bird count. Photo: Kathy Rigling

Green PLACE Nature & Photography Hike February 24, 2024

Orange Audubon Society (OAS) is offering a FREE guided Nature & Photography Hike on Saturday, February 24, 2024 at Johns Lake Conservation Area in Winter Garden directly south of Oakland. Beth Jackson, naturalist and Orange County Green PLACE manager, and Lee Ann Posavad, OAS board member and wildlife photographer, will co-lead this hike, ideal for youth and families. With 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 138-acre Orange County Green PLACE property on Johns Lake. Opened in 2015, the property has a kayak launch and fishing pier and a quarter-mile walking trail.

Join us February 24, 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. at John's Lake Conservation Area, 880 Avalon Rd, Winter Garden, FL 34787. 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.

New Field Trip SignUp Procedures Are Working!

Orange Audubon Society (OAS) now has easy procedures to sign up online, pay for trips, provide your emergency contact information and sign your photo permission and liability waiver. Here is [the link](#) or simply go to the OAS website and click on the Activities button. Then click the Field Trips button. See the yellow block that says "OAS has transitioned to online signup for field trips. Field trips are released (open for sign-up) bimonthly, except for overnight trips, which are released early. SIGN UP for classes and PAY here." Click on Pay Here and choose if you are an OAS member or not. Particularly OAS' Limited Edition Field Trips fill up quickly, so plan ahead.

Thanks to OAS' webmaster Sonia Stephens for her hard work to make registration easy. With field trips filling up, OAS could offer more trips if we had more qualified trip leaders. Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com if interested.

Don't Miss These Trips!

Skimmers, Terns and Shorebirds, Disappearing Island Boat Trip, March 23, 2024

During the NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL, the new boat trip to Disappearing Island in Ponce Inlet, in the Marine Discovery Center's boat from New Smyrna Beach, was so popular that we have set up another one for March 23, 2024, 1 to 4 pm.

As a special feature, the trip is again led by shorebird and gull expert Michael Brothers. Price is \$65 for OAS members and \$90 for non-members. Use this [link](#) and if full, email info@orangeaudubonfl.org to wait list.

Northwest FL Panhandle Birding April 10-14, 2024

Orange Audubon Society's four-day trip to see migratory and breeding songbirds and shorebirds in the Florida Panhandle will be April 10-14, 2024.

The cost of \$300 for members; \$350 for non-members includes a great itinerary, local expert guides, Wakulla Springs boat tour and some picnic meals. Photos of last year's trip are in the [June OASis](#), p. 8.

Use this [link](#) to register. For lodging and other details, contact Teresa Williams at mwilliams@cfl.rr.com.

Warblers and More in Ohio May 13-18, 2024

Orange Audubon Society's May trip with Wildside Nature Tours will provide excellent up-close opportunities for birders and photographers!

Witness the return of neotropical migrants during the height of spring migration at what is aptly-described as "the Warbler Capital of the World" – Magee Marsh, on the south shore of Lake Erie in northwestern Ohio.

Gabriel Lugo, who led our fun Puerto Rico trip three years ago, will lead. Cost is \$2,200 for lodging and guiding; flight and meals additional. [Visit Wildside's link for details and to register](#), and please also email info@orangeaudubonfl.org.

To see what will be in store for this trip, tune in to our January 25th Bird Chat on Wood Warblers of Ohio by Tammy Martin. [Link to register for Bird Chats.](#)

Education Coordinator Update

Orange Audubon Society's Education Program continues in high gear. The Young Birders Club had a Big Day field trip at the NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL. The students ended up with 99 species for the day! A big thank you to John Groskopf, Jim McGinity and Alex DeBear for helping lead this adventure.

More schools have been signing up to do schoolyard bird counts. Our new KOWA youth binoculars are still holding strong, providing clear views of the birds for the students.

In December, I led bird counts at three elementary schools. At Northlake Park Community School, we were greeted by a very cooperative Red-shouldered Hawk that hunted the schoolyard during the entire count. The students were enthralled and affectionately named it "Bob."

I did four afterschool birding club visits in December. The students enjoyed using our *Florida Birds* guides to research a bird of their choice.

At Andover Elementary, I participated in a STREAM (Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering and Math) night, in which the students enjoyed our interactive bird beak adaptation game.

Our next free educational webinar will be January 10th from 7:00 to 7:30 pm on teaching sustainability in the classroom. The link to sign up is <http://eepurl.com/imGskM>

Please email me at education@orangeaudubonfl.org to book a classroom or afterschool visit or to request a classroom subscription to *Audubon Adventures* magazine. I hope we see you in the new year!

Kathy Rigling, Education Coordinator

The American Bison

This story continues our monthly profiles of animal species protected under the 50-year old Endangered Species Act — or in this case, that weren't and why.

The American Bison, *Bison bison*, is one of two species, alongside the European bison. It is not related to true buffalo, such as the water buffalo in South Asia or cape buffalo in Africa. Buffalo is an incorrect but widely used nickname.



An American Bison at Yellowstone. Photo: Patrick Craig

The bison is North America's largest land animal, weighing 1,000-plus pounds. In 2016, thanks to lobbying by conservationists, it became the national mammal of the U.S. This is the first mammal designation, as the bison joins the Bald Eagle, our national symbol.

Bison eat grasses and broadleaved plants, foraging most of the day. Their large protruding shoulder hump allows them to swing their heads from side-to-side to clear snow to create foraging patches. They wallow or roll on the dry ground in a "dust bath," whether to shed a winter coat or seek relief from biting insects. The wallow is where pioneer plants establish a foothold. Wallowing and bison feeding habits help ensure diversity of prairie plant species.

In mid October, our local PBS station showed documentarian Ken Burns' new film, *The American Buffalo*. This two-part, four-hour film tells the moving story of a species whose numbers — in just over a decade — collapsed from 12-15 million to fewer than a thousand, representing "one of the most dramatic examples of our ability to destroy the natural world." Burn's film shows how this species "sustained the lives of Native people for untold generations, and the utter devastation felt by all the tribes at the destruction of the great herds."

In its second part, the film tells how efforts to save the bison have intertwined with creation of our National Parks. In saving the bison, far-thinking individuals saved our special places for other animals and human visitors. *The American Buffalo* was written by Dayton Duncan, who also wrote *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*, *The Dust Bowl*, and *Lewis and Clark*, Burns' most memorable films for today's conservationist.

Advisors from the National Museum of the American Indian helped with the heart-breaking part about the Native Americans.

Bison Conservation and Audubon

We know the name George Bird Grinnell as organizer of the first Audubon Society. In 1886, Grinnell was appalled by the mass slaughter of egrets and herons for the millinery trade. From 1880 to 1911, Grinnell served as editor of the weekly *Forest and Stream*, and wrote articles and lobbied for congressional support for wildlife protection, including birds but particularly for the American bison.

A bond with Theodore Roosevelt (U.S. president from 1901-1909) was forged due to Grinnell's expertise on Plains Indians, the bison, and other aspects of western natural history. Grinnell and Roosevelt believed that if something was not done to stop the wanton hunting of large mammals, the result would be their extinction.

Yellowstone was established as the world's first national park by an act of Congress and signed into law on March 1, 1872, by President Ulysses S. Grant. Grinnell's editorials spoke to the importance of Yellowstone's small bison herd. With the passage of the 1894 National Park Protective Act, the remaining 200 wild bison in Yellowstone received a measure of protection.

However, by 1902, poaching had reduced populations to only 23 bison. Grinnell urged the Department of Interior to find additional animals in the wild to supplement the Yellowstone herd.

Roosevelt, along with Bronx Zoo director William T. Hornaday, founded the American Bison Society in 1905 to prevent bison extinction. One of their first moves was to ship 15 bison from the Bronx Zoo to the Wichita



Bison at Yellowstone Photo: National Park Service

Mountains National Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma. In 1908, Roosevelt successfully urged Congress to establish the National Bison Range in Montana.

Today, there are more than 350,000 American Bison, most of them descendants of 77 animals from five founding herds at the start of the 20th century.

Bison Genetics

Approximately 20,500 bison are in conservation herds and the remainder in commercial herds. Challenges remain. Lack of genetic diversity due to the population bottleneck during the near-extinction event reduces survivability. And early ranchers had seen money in bison meat and pelts and had brought them into cultivation on their ranches. Either purposeful or accidental hybridization with domestic cattle has brought cattle genes into the bison population. Of today's bison, only an estimated 15,000 to 25,000 are not actually bison-cattle hybrids.

Disease is a real threat. Brucellosis is a disease that induces stillbirths, caused by the non-native bacterium *Brucella abortus*. Cattle brought brucellosis to Yellowstone in the early 1900s and transmitted it to bison and elk populations. Billions of dollars have been spent to eradicate brucellosis from cattle in the U.S.. And sadly, the disease now only persists in the bison and elk populations of the Greater Yellowstone Area, [making bison preservation unpopular with ranchers](#).

Only the herd at Elk Island National Park in Canada, along with that at Yellowstone, do not show interbreeding with cattle. Conservation groups have been working to establish additional non-hybrid herds in other locations, including on Native American lands. Bison advocates have petitioned the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to list the Yellowstone population on the

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The American Bison

continued from p. 4

endangered species list [and the petition is currently under review.](#)

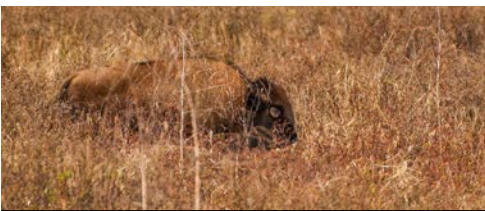
The Eastern Bison

The bison of eastern North America is the subspecies called Wood Bison, as opposed to the more widespread Plains Bison. The latter subspecies have massive heads with short noses and clearly defined shaggy capes that cover the upper portion of their bodies. Woods Bison have large triangular heads and less defined shoulder capes and head hair, and they have more distinctive and bigger shoulder humps.

Beginning in the 1670's, Spanish journals recorded bison in small herds in Florida, especially in the panhandle, and in neighboring states, while other sources recorded them in northeastern forests. By the 1770s they were gone from most or all of North and South Carolina, Alabama and Florida.

Wood Bison survive in Northern Canada, including about 3,000 in Canada's largest national park, Wood Buffalo National Park, that spans the Alberta-Northwest Territories border.

In an effort to re-establish a free-roaming herd of bison in Florida, in 1975 Tallahassee wildlife officials acquired ten Plains Bison from the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma. Their new home was Paynes Prairie Preserve State Park, a 23,000-acre preserve south of Gainesville.



Bison on Paynes Prairie. Photo: Steve Shaluta

Paynes Prairie also became home to a group of wild horses. The bison herd grew to almost 40 before brucellosis hit in the 1980s, requiring many to be killed. More recently, as visitation and homes in the area have both increased, bison have escaped from the property. Male bison have had some negative encounters with visitors, precipitating plans to reduce the number to a non-reproducing herd (all female) appropriate for the size of the prairie basin.

Handsome Roseate Spoonbill: Species Of Concern

Exotic wading birds, Roseate Spoonbills have long, flat bills shaped like a spatula. When foraging in marshes for crustaceans and fish, they sweep their heads from side-to-side to feel for prey, then snap their bills closed to swallow it. Birders and non-birders alike adore this species and travel many miles to see one. While the overall impression of Spoonbills is that of “flamboyant pink,” they display other unusual colors.

The pink adult has red “drippings” on its shoulders, long red legs, a yellow patch on its side, and an orange tail! Its bald head is pale green. Males and females have similar coloration and juveniles have whitish-pink plumage. The Roseate Spoonbill is one of six species worldwide, the only Spoonbill found in the New World, and the only one with brilliantly colored plumage. The pink color is derived from the yellow, orange and red pigments in the plants and algae the birds eat.

Highly gregarious, this species nests and roosts along shallow water in large colonies with other wading birds, typically on islands, placing their nests in the shadiest parts of trees and shrubs. When breeding, males bob their heads up and down and shake twigs to get the attention of females. Interested pairs bite each other's bills or raise their outstretched wings, and the males collect sticks for the females to build a bulky platform with moss and bark about 22 inches wide. How amazing!

Roseate Spoonbills were more abundant in the early 1800s before plume-hunters decimated them. Hunting of egrets disturbed rookeries shared by Spoonbills, and the species was virtually extirpated in Texas until the 1920s when breeders helped restore them. Designated an Audubon Priority Bird, or a species of special conservation concern, Spoonbills nest in protected areas like Everglades National Park. They forage, however, in unprotected areas that can be negatively impacted by changes in water management and food availability. Since there is much we do not know about the ecology and behavior of Roseate Spoonbills, the Audubon Everglades Science Center in the Florida Keys is monitoring Roseate Spoonbill nesting and foraging habits. For more information on this research check [out the Orange Audubon YouTube channel.](#)

Where to see this species? Found year-round in South America, the Caribbean, South Texas, and South Florida, you may also see them at the Orlando Wetlands in Christmas, Florida. I have found them in fall, winter, and spring—often with chicks—on the cypress island near the boardwalk with Egrets, Great Blue Herons, and Wood Storks. Check this out! You will fall in love as I have with the remarkable, mysterious Roseate Spoonbill. Florida has so many amazing avian species!

Linda Carpenter



Roseate Spoonbills. Photos: Mary Keim.

I highly recommend Ken Burns' *The American Buffalo*. Ways to watch the full documentary are: 1. if you have a university or public library card, find it [through Kanopy](#); 2. rent on iTunes or join your local PBS station for \$60 to have Passport access to view shows. On Friday, January 5th, Blood Memory, the first episode of the program will be aired on WUCF at 9 p.m.

Deborah Green

New Year: Check On or Update Your Membership

The new year is a great time to renew your 3-way membership in Orange Audubon Society (OAS), Audubon Florida and National Audubon Society. Email us to check if your membership has expired and, if so, when.

Please pay directly to Orange Audubon Society, and we transmit the funds to National. If you want to include an additional donation, which goes to OAS, you can. Otherwise the rate is \$20 (\$15 for students). If you renew through National and include more than \$20, both \$20 plus any additional will go to National.

For both new memberships and renewals, please do it directly through OAS. You can download this [membership form](#), print and send a check to Orange Audubon Society, P.O.Box 941142, Maitland, FL 32794-1142. Or go to OAS' website and click the [Join/Renew link](#).

Thank you for using membership as a way to support OAS. If you have questions about your expiration date, email membership@orangeaudubonfl.org.

Deborah Green, Membership Co-chair



Russet-naped Wood Rail and Ocellated Turkey, Photos: Kevin Loughlin, Wildside Nature Tours; Sun Grebe. Photo: Bob Davidheiser; Trip leader Glenn Crawford calling out a bird, Wildside Belize Trip 2018, Photo: Deborah Green

Belize Tropical Birding, February 3-11, 2024

Orange Audubon Society hosts a special February trip with Wildside Nature Tours to Belize, guided by Glenn Crawford. For more about Glenn, a gifted naturalist and trip leader from that country, see the [September OASis](#), p. 9.

The 9-day trip is February 3-11, 2024 and costs \$3,300, including food, lodging and guiding. Cost of your flight is additional. The trip is to the northern part of Belize with a new extension to add some Yucatan endemics. [Visit Wildside's link for details and to register](#), and please also email info@orangeaudubonfl.org.

JANUARY/FEBRUARY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Chats with OAS via Zoom

Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

- Winter birding in the Chihuahuan Desert, New Mexico by Natasza Fontaine

January 4, 2024

- eBirding by the Bird Chats Team

January 11, 2024

- Wood Warblers of Ohio by Tammy Martin

January 25, 2024

Birds of Prey Identification Trip with Bob Sanders

January 14, 2024

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Wekiwa Springs State Park Bird Survey

January 14, 2024

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

January Program: Tips to Create Amazing Nature Photos by Reg Garner

January 18, 2024

Contact Alan at alangrandiflora@gmail.com

Monthly Field Trip to PEAR Park

January 20, 2024

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com.

Rock Springs Run State Reserve Bird Survey

January 24, 2024

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Oakland Nature Preserve Bird Survey

January 28, 2024

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Birds of Prey Identification Trip with Bob Sanders

February 4, 2024

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

February Program: Creating Bird Habitat Through Restored Wetlands by Debra Segal

February 15, 2024

Contact Alan at alangrandiflora@gmail.com

Great Backyard Bird Count

February 16-19, 2024

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Monthly Field Trip to Circle B Bar Reserve, Lakeland

February 17, 2024

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Green PLACE Nature & Photography Hike

February 24, 2024

Contact Beth at (407) 836-1481