



Clockwise, left to right, Rusty Blackbirds, Photo: Lori Mathis; King Rail, Photo: Debra Segal; Sweetwater Wetlands Park, Photo: Gainesville Regional Utilities

This Month's Program, February 15, 2024

Creating Bird Habitat Through Restored Wetlands by Debra Segal

Gainesville's Sweetwater Wetlands Park was created to improve the water quality of Sweetwater Branch, an urban creek, before it flows onto Paynes Prairie and into Alachua Sink. Options to meet the requirement to reduce nitrogen entering Alachua Sink were evaluated by the City of Gainesville and Gainesville Regional Utilities (GRU). Recreating a wetlands, following the general model of our Orlando Wetlands Park, allowed industrial discharge from the GRU power plant, wastewater effluent from Gainesville's Main Street Water Reclamation Facility plus stormwater runoff to be filtered.

Debra Segal, president of Alachua Audubon, worked in wetlands ecology, soil science, and environmental permitting for over 25 years. Through her employer Wetland Solutions, Inc., she helped design and permit this project. Sweetwater Wetlands Park has been successful ecologically and also recreationally, becoming an ecotourism destination. Over 250 bird species have been recorded. Because of these community-wide benefits, GRU is planning a second treatment wetland in western Gainesville. Debra serves on stakeholder committees for Sweetwater as well as for the proposed new treatment wetland.

Join Orange Audubon Society (OAS) for a fascinating presentation. Although we hope to record it for later viewing, we encourage you to join us in-person at Leu Gardens (address below), so you can to ask questions. We look forward to seeing 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 February 4, 2024

On Sunday, February 4, 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.

Popular trip leader and raptor expert Bob Sanders co-founded the Chimney Rock Hawk Watch in Martinsville, New Jersey before moving to Central Florida.

Price 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.

Green PLACE Nature & Photography Hike February 24, 2024

Orange Audubon Society (OAS) is offering a FREE guided Nature & Photography Hike on Saturday, February 24th at the Johns Lake Conservation Area in Winter Garden.

Beth Jackson, naturalist and Orange County Green PLACE manager, and Lee Ann Posavad, OAS board member and wildlife photographer, will co-lead.

The walk is ideal for youth and families and is part of a long-standing partnership between OAS and Orange County in promotion of the important Green PLACE preserves.

We will explore this 138-acre Orange County Green PLACE property on Johns Lake that opened in 2015.

The walk will be February 24, from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. at John's Lake Conservation Area, 880 Avalon Rd, Winter Garden, FL 34787. It is free, but reservations necessary. Call Beth Jackson at (407) 836-1481 or email GreenPLACE@ocfl.net to reserve.

Wetlands and Lakes Still Need Protection



Friday, February 2nd is World Wetlands Day. Orange Audubon Society (OAS) recently celebrated the December 12th passage of Orange County's updated Wetlands Ordinance, and we are aware that Orange County's Environmental Protection Division is hiring additional staff to implement it.

OAS steps up where we can to protect Lake Apopka and the St. Johns River Water Management District's restored North Shore wetlands. Our March 21st program at Leu Gardens will be by Dr. Erich Marzolf, who is Director, Division of Water Resources, at the District. Topic: The Comeback of Lake Apopka.

Hydrilla Control

For Lake Apopka, simply reducing the input of nutrients from the Zellwood muck farms, through the state buyout of the farms in the 1990s, has done a tremendous amount. With fewer nutrients, algal growth has been reduced. The algae blocked light and kept beneficial submerged native vegetation like eelgrass from growing. Eelgrass is now growing back on its own, and it and other native aquatic plant species have been planted by the District and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Unfortunately, the invasive plant hydrilla—released from aquariums in the 1960s—has taken off, now that sunlight is able to enter the lake.

Treatment of hydrilla to keep it in check is a part of continuing lake restoration. Advocating for hydrilla control is the non-profit Friends of Lake Apopka (FOA), founded by the late Jim Thomas, that lobbied for the original funding for the farm buyout and that continues working to protect the lake. Unfortunately, because some waterfowl feed in the hydrilla and some fish as well, many duck-hunters and fisherman want to keep some hydrilla.

Without experience in lake management, they would not know how easily hydrilla can expand, take over and set back lake restoration efforts. When Joe Dunn, past president of FOA, asked me to be part of a video FOA was making on hydrilla control, he had no idea of my passion for native plants and control of invasive plants that had started fifty years ago through plant ecology and biological control of weeds training I received in entomology grad school. [See the video here](#). FOA is working to secure a previously legislated \$5 million in state funding for Lake Apopka restoration. We appreciate this continued advocacy.

Growth of Birding and Ecotourism's Input to the Economy

Over half of the U.S. population 16 years or older enjoyed wildlife watching in 2022, according to the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's most recent survey](#). Wildlife watching is defined here as closely observing, feeding, or photographing wildlife, visiting public parks to view wildlife, and maintaining plantings and natural areas around the home for the benefit of wildlife.

In 2018, the District engaged a University of Florida (UF) professor and his grad students in an evaluation of input into the local economy from visitation to the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive (LAWD). As I calculated for my last [Orlando Sentinel Op-Ed](#), looking at the visitation to LAWD and "Counting cyclists and hikers - some of whom are from out of area and spending money on gas, food, lodging, and incidentals - there has been a 66% increase in visitation since the 2018 UF study. Extrapolating from UF's data, Orange Audubon calculates an annual monetary benefit to the local economy of \$6 million." This is great economic value as well as environmental value.

Green PLACE Program Growing

Increased funding for the Green PLACE (county natural lands) program was passed by the Orange County Board of County Commissioners 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. 1).

Audubon Florida Lobbying For Environment in Tallahassee

Audubon Florida's policy staff in Tallahassee are working hard on environmental issues, interfacing with legislators. The *Audubon Florida Advocate* newsletter is sent weekly during the legislative session. Please [sign up at this link](#) and respond to calls to contact our representatives.

Deborah Green, OAS president and Conservation Committee member



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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Count Backyard Birds!

Each February, for four days, the world comes together for the love of birds.

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) was the first community (citizen) science project to collect online data on birds. This year it will be February 16-19, 2024. GBBC participants turn in hundreds of thousands of checklists reporting over 7000 species of birds. This creates an annual snapshot of the distribution and abundance of birds. In fact, you can watch online the map fill in as people submit their observations -- [in real time!](#)

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



Owls eat rodents, and if these have consumed rodenticide baits, owls may sicken and die.
Photo: Mark Schocken

Comment Against Rodenticides

The non-profit Beyond Pesticides is warning the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that its [inadequate review of rodenticide toxicity will lead to biodiversity collapse](#). The comment period ends February 13, 2024.

See our article [in the June 2023 OASis](#) (p.4) and see the owl protection work of the [Safety Harbor Owls group](#). A detailed examination of the issue in draft comments from Beyond Pesticides is at [this link](#). Urge the EPA to improve its protection of endangered species [from rodenticides](#).

Intermediate Bird Identification March 23 and 30, 2024

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.



Bob Sanders showing a good raptor identification book at recent Raptor ID field trip. Photo: Deborah Green

The class is two-part. The sessions are on March 23rd and March 30th, both at Orlando Wetlands 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. Registration is on our website: <https://orangeaudubonfl.org/field-trip-signup/>. Email any questions to info@orangeaudubonfl.org.



Four American Flamingos being seen from Haulover Canal at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, during the NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL. Photo: Glenn Turner

Flamingo Reporting

This past September, Hurricane Idalia blew dozens of American Flamingos across the eastern half of the U.S. The Florida Flamingo Working Group is asking us to report any flamingos we see from February 18 through February 25, 2024. Report sightings here: <https://fl.audubon.org/flamingoreport>

February's Exciting Bird Chats and Quest for YouTube Subscribers

Since 2020, Orange Audubon Society (OAS) has been doing Bird Chats on Zoom each 1st, 2nd and 4th Thursday at 7 p.m., from September through June. The original Bird Chats team was Kathy Rigling, Susan Thome-Barrett and myself, plus two great bird photographers, Jack Horton and Sam Mitcham. Jack and Sam now just share their photos with us, but Kathy, Susan and I enjoy doing Bird Chats and have continued.

We record and post the guest speaker portion of these three Bird Chats a month on [Orange Audubon Society's YouTube channel](#), along with the recording of the monthly 3rd Thursday in-person program. OAS board member David Bottomley records the in-person presentations.

We have over 150 videos posted on our channel, and we have nearly 900 subscribers! We recently learned that once we reach 1000 subscribers, we can work with YouTube and receive payment for ads that they already put on our videos.

Subscribing to a YouTube channel doesn't cost you anything and doesn't mean you receive any extra emails. When you go to our channel either by [this link](#) or just by writing Orange Audubon Society in the YouTube search field, you will see a Subscribe button next to our name. Just press that to show your support.

Here's the link [to sign up](#) to watch Bird Chats on Zoom and be able to ask questions. You will be sent the Zoom link and the program description each week.

OAS has some fantastic speakers lined up in February, listed on p.8. We have booked flamingo expert Steven Whitfield to present on February 8th. His topic is Past, Present, and Future of American Flamingos in Florida. Steven was co-author of an [interesting proposal to make the flamingo our state bird](#). We wish it could be the Florida Scrub-Jay, but maybe the flamingo has a chance and would help protect wetlands. *Deborah Green*

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Orange Audubon Society (OAS) follows National Audubon's efforts: *The birds Audubon pledges to protect differ in color, size, behavior, geographical preference, and countless other ways. By honoring and celebrating the equally remarkable diversity of the human species, Audubon will bring new creativity, effectiveness and leadership to our work throughout the hemisphere.*

Interfaith Environmental Alliance Walk, February 25, 2024

The Interfaith Environmental Alliance of Central Florida (IEACF) is going on its second wildlife walk, suitable for all ages, with OAS' Education Coordinator Kathy Rigling and other OAS volunteers.

The walk will be Sunday, February 25, 2024, 2-4 p.m. at Orlando Wetlands. The path has areas of soft sand so it unfortunately is not suitable for wheelchairs. Follow [this link](#) to register. And if you have any questions for IEACF, email ieacf123@gmail.com.



David Bottomley at the Free the Ocklawaha Rally at Magnolia Park. Photo: Deborah Green

Conservation Co-Chair Evaluates Parks for Wheelchair Accessibility

Orange Audubon Society board member and conservation co-chair David Bottomley is a conservation advocate who has been wheelchair-bound for 30 years. In addition to advocating to conserve the Ocklawaha and other natural lands, David's personal cause is wheelchair accessibility of our parks. He participates in stakeholder meetings, visits sites to check accessibility and provides feedback to park managers. He records a narrative of his trips by wheelchair using his Garmin recorder. David's advocacy paves the way for others who are wheelchair-bound, and we appreciate it.



2021 Trip. Photo: Alexa Santoni

Buscando Pajaros, March 9, 2024

For the 3rd year, OAS is hosting a tram ride at Orlando Wetlands, led by Gilberto Sanchez in his native Spanish. Gilberto is a skilled photographer and Orlando Wetlands volunteer.

The trip will be Saturday, March 9th, from 9 to 11:30 a.m. It is free but limited to 20 people, with registration on the OAS website [at this link](#). If you have any questions, contact Deborah at info@orangeaudubonfl.org or 407-637-2525.

NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL's Young Leaders

The team putting together the annual NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL has a nose for talent and has recruited many young hotshot birders as leaders.

For most of these Millennials, our festival is their first as leaders, but they are soon recruited for the Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival or other festivals.



Birding by Ear near the McDonald Canal led by Natasza Fontaine and Robert Gundy, 2021 NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL. Photo: Deborah Green

Natasza Fontaine, a trip leader since 2021 is also a talented artist, avian recordist and researcher. She has presented [for OAS on Bird Chats](#) four times. Most recently she was the artist selected to do the [American Birding Association's Bird of the Year](#).

Keynote speakers for the 2023 NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL were Luis Gles and Mariah Hryniewich, the Florida

LGBTQIA+ Bird Walk March 10, 2024

LGBTQIA+ is the abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual. The additional "+" stands for all of the other identities not encompassed in the short acronym.

Center for Birds of Prey (CBOP) has joined OAS in hosting a bird walk at Orlando Wetlands led by Kathy Rigling, other OAS volunteers and CBOP staff.

The trip will be Sunday, March 10th, from 10 a.m. to noon. It is free but space is limited. Visit cbop.audubon.org/events for more information and to register.

Thanks to the City of Orlando's Orlando Wetlands for providing such a wildlife-rich place and welcoming OAS to hold these many events!

Keys Hawkwatchers, who were leading for our festival for the fourth time. Their well-received keynote was on Birding St. Paul Island in the Pribilofs (Alaska).



Luis and Mariah presenting Saturday keynote at the 2023 NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL. Photo: Deborah Green. Trip leader Alex DeBear. Photo courtesy Alex DeBear

The 2023 festival had the most young leaders, including the youngest trip leaders ever, 18-year old Alex DeBear and 13-year old Ethan Landreville, leading with his father Brennan. More in 2024!



Western Cattle Egret in breeding plumage, Orlando Wetlands. Photo: Mary Keim

Western Cattle Egret

Cattle Egrets are smaller, more compact than other egrets and feed in drier habitats. They forage in groups in pastures and fields, alongside grazing animals, eating insects attracted to the animals and stirred up by their feet.

If you do eBird lists, you may have found that suddenly the common Cattle Egret is listed as rare! This is because it has a new name, and being flagged as rare on eBird is based on the frequency with which it has been recorded. If you don't yet do eBird, Kathy Rigling and Susan Thome-Barrett provided [an introduction or refresher](#) on Bird Chats.

In 2023, the International Ornithologists' Union split Cattle Egret into two species: Western and Eastern. Western Cattle Egrets are native to Africa, but, probably blown by a storm, reached northeastern South America by 1877. They spread to the United States by 1941 and were found nesting here by 1953. Over the past 70 years, they have become one of the most abundant North American herons, showing up as far north as Alaska and Newfoundland. Western Cattle Egrets also live in western Asia and southern Europe.

Eastern Cattle Egrets are found in southern and eastern Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. David Sibley illustrates [how much more salmon color](#) the Eastern Cattle Egret has in breeding plumage, a major character noted in the species split. *Deborah Green*

The Remarkable Wood Stork

Ugly? Perhaps. The dark bald head, rough scaly neck, and awkward stroll appear unattractive to some. Why can't they be pink and pretty like, say, Flamingos? But to many bird lovers, Wood Storks are beautiful, graceful, interesting, and easy to see in Florida wetlands year-round. More than three-foot-tall, the species towers over many other wading birds as they stroll through swamps and marshes with their bulky bill deep in the water foraging for fish and crustaceans. When they feel something touch their bill, they quickly snap it closed, swallowing prey whole. Or they may push their feet up and down in the water and flick their wings to startle small fish. While they can visually search for food, they more often feel for it, especially where the water is muddy. What an amazing skill!

Wood Storks roost and nest along the water's edge in cypress swamps, mangroves and flooded areas with black gum and Australian pines—wherever standing water is present. Males and females gather sticks to build a bulky nest three-to-five-feet wide, lining the nest with greenery that is soon covered with guano that holds it all together. These birds are highly social; they forage in groups and nest in colonies with egrets and herons. Contrary to the myth, Wood Storks don't mate for life. A pair remains together for only a single breeding season.

Common in the United States, their numbers were stable from 1966-2019; however, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services lists the species as federally threatened. This is primarily because they are vulnerable to changes in water levels. During dry years, if standing water near nesting sites is damaged by water management diversions, they may not nest. Low water levels also increase their vulnerability to predators like raccoons and reduce the amount of available food.

Where to find this remarkable species? I often see large colonies at the Orlando Wetlands in Christmas, Florida. It's a thrill to see 60 Wood Storks chilling out on the berms or nurturing nestlings by the new boardwalk. I also have seen them foraging solo in retention ponds and on lakeshores everywhere, at Mead Botanical Garden, or soaring overhead with vultures. Look for their enormous bill and black flight feathers on underwings and tail that contrast sharply with their creamy white bodies. Check it out! You will fall in love as I have with the remarkable, beautiful Wood Stork. Florida has incredible avian treasures!

Linda Carpenter



Wood Storks at Orlando Wetlands Park. Photos: Mary Keim.

Survival Thanks to the Endangered Species Act But Monitoring Needed

We continue monthly profiles of species protected under the 50-year old Endangered Species Act (ESA). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) first listed the U.S. breeding population of Wood Stork as endangered in 1984, because it had declined by more than 75 percent over a 50-year time period starting in the 1930s. This was largely due to the draining and development of wetlands. Wetlands

protection has resulted in an increase in nesting populations, and in 2014 USFWS reclassified this species from Endangered to Threatened.

In February 2023, USFWS proposed to remove the Wood Stork from the endangered species list because the species "has recovered" (To follow, look up Docket No. [FWS-R4-ES-2022-0099](#)).

The ESA saved the Wood Stork, and

this helped preserve and rebuild vital habitats in the Southeast. But in Audubon Florida's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, once the largest Wood Stork nursery in North America, nesting has crashed. [Housing developments in the Corkscrew watershed are further threatening](#). The USFWS needs to continue monitoring the stork's population to make sure ongoing threats don't undo hard-fought success.



Zellwood Elementary afterschool birding club uses spotting scope. Photo: Kathy Rigling

**Help Needed:
Field Trip Assistants**

Do you love going to Mead Botanical Garden? Do you enjoy helping others find birds? Orange Audubon Society (OAS) needs volunteers to assist with the weekly Saturday bird walks in April.

These volunteers will assist the trip leader to help the participants who are often brand new to birding to see the beautiful songbirds that come to rest and refuel. No experience is necessary, just a willingness to share your excitement and love of birds with others. Please contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail for more information or to sign up for a date.

School Education Help

Do you like working with children? Perhaps are a retired educator? OAS' part-time Education Coordinator can use assistance from time to time on school visits or at evening school STEM or Green Fair events. Please contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail for more information.

Spring Outreach Help

In April, OAS has two Earth Day events plus the Apopka Art and Foliage Festival. We could use more volunteers at our booths who like to interact with people and share about birds and OAS' efforts. If you can help, email Deborah at info@orangeaudubonfl.org.



Flight Through Cypress—Barred Owls. 2023 Chertok Florida Native Nature Photo Contest, Honorable Mention, Advanced Category. Photo: Mark Hainen

Mead Volunteers Step Up

Keeping the birds happy and feeders full at Mead Botanical Garden, OAS has two new volunteers to fill the gap now that Larry Martin has retired. Karina Jimenez, Communications Associate with Audubon Florida, and Ave Armstrong, part-time Nurse Practitioner, both of Winter Park, are alternating weeks. If you live nearby and would like to share feeder-filling duties, contact Susan at 2904susan@gmail.com. We appreciate greatly donation of the bird seed by Wild Blrds Unlimited, Winter Springs.

**Circle B Bar Field Trip
February 17, 2024**

Orange Audubon Society's next monthly field trip will be to Circle B Bar Reserve in Polk County. Led by Alice Horst of the Village Birders, Tammy Martin of Ohio (our recent Bird Chats presenter) and Susan Thome-Barrett, the trip will explore the trails of this beautiful 1,267 acre wetland property on the northwest shore of Lake Hancock. The trip is free, but spots are limited. To register, use this link .

Pear Park Trip Report

The first monthly free field trip of 2024 was a very cold excursion to PEAR Park in Leesburg on January 20th, led by Gigi Del Pizzo, Kathy Rigling and Lee Ann Posavad. We saw some beautiful birds and, guided by Lee Ann, some took great photos. Participants were excited to see four sparrow species: Vesper, Chipping, Grasshopper and Song Sparrow. Other highlights were a flyover by a Cooper's Hawk, an American Kestrel, a flyover of Eastern Bluebirds, and two cooperative Orange-crowned Warblers.



Gulls, terns and shorebirds at Disappearing Island. Photo: Deborah Green

**Disappearing Island Boat
Trip, March 23, 2024**

During the NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL, the new boat trip to Disappearing Island in Ponce Inlet, to see Black Skimmers, terns and shorebirds, was so popular that we have set up another one for Saturday, March 23rd. We travel in the Marine Discovery Center's large pontoon boat from New Smyrna Beach. The trip is again led by our amazing shorebird and gull expert Michael Brothers. Additional leaders are Chris Newton and Reinhard Geisler.

The time is 1 to 4 pm, in relation to the tides. Price is \$65 for OAS members and \$90 for non-members. Use this link, and if full, email info@orangeaudubonfl.org to wait list.

Education Coordinator Update

Orange Audubon Society's (OAS) educational visits continue. Two new schools have joined our afterschool birding clubs: Lakeville Elementary School in Apopka and the OCPS Academic Center for Excellence in downtown Orlando.

Our birding clubs are researching a local "focus" bird, using the Florida field guides which OAS purchased. Students have also been learning to identify birds by their behavior. They had great fun imitating bird behavior with a rousing game of "Birdy says!"

The Zellwood Elementary Birding Club had the opportunity to use a spotting scope. Despite light rain, from under a building overhang the students had a closeup view of an American Kestrel perched on the roof!

The Forest Trails Playschool learned about community science and conducted a bird count at the UCF Arboretum. Students watched Ospreys in a nest and found Brown-headed Nuthatches in the pines by their squeaky calls.

At Hunter's Creek Middle School, I led the bird beak adaptations activity with two sets of 8th grade classes. 246 students were taught that day!

Our next free educational webinar is about participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count with your students and will be February 7th from 7:00-7:30 pm. Sign up at [this link](#).

Please email education@orangeaudubonfl.org to sign up for classroom or afterschool visits.

Kathy Rigling, Education Coordinator

Young Birders Update

Tallahassee Trip

Orange Audubon Society's (OAS) Young Birders Club joined with the Florida Young Birders Club for an inaugural overnight field trip over the Martin Luther King weekend. Young Birders with their parents traveled to Tall Timbers Research Station north of Tallahassee, where we had secured lodging at the research station. We had an amazing time from start to finish.

We were first given a trailer tour of Tall Timbers by Jim Cox, recently retired researcher at Tall Timbers. The highlight was seeing Red-Cockaded Woodpeckers interacting with each other and foraging on pine trees at very close range.

Given the opportunity to look for a Short-eared Owl, most of the youngsters arose very early and drove with their parents about an hour and a half south to wait for this owl to appear. It did, and we all watched it hunting for about 10 minutes.

With the day just beginning, we were treated to an exploration of St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge led by local bird expert Don Morrow and ornithologists Dana Bryan of Tallahassee (see his [Limpkin talk for us on Bird Chats](#)) and Dr. Marianne Korosy, Audubon Florida's retired director of bird conservation.

In the late afternoon, after a pizza dinner, Jim Cox presented for us about the Black Rail, and then led us on a dusk excursion into the marsh to look for this threatened species. Yes, we did see one! The kids were thrilled.

The following morning, even though it was very cold, the Young Birders had the chance to observe bird banding at Tall Timbers, led by Marianne Korosy. Several Swamp Sparrows, a Bachman's Sparrow and a very spunky, female Eastern Towhee were seen close up. To top off the day, we took a short hike and were able to hear and see a Winter Wren.

Young Birders Growing Statewide

The OAS Young Birders Club started in 2021, when OAS board member Susan Thome-Barrett and I were joined on birding trips by then 10-year old avid naturalist Haden Klinger and his mother. OAS' club was preceded



Above, Jim Cox leading group to search for Black Rails. Below, Beach birding. Photos: Jim McGinity

by one in the Tampa Area formed by educator and bird bander Jim McGinity (who [presented for us on Bird Chats on his banding station](#)).

In 2021, Jim created the statewide Florida Young Birders Club for youth ages 9 to 17. Sponsored by the Florida Ornithological Society, the club provides monthly field trips to birding hotspots and the chance to participate in bird conservation service projects.

It is gratifying that experienced adult birders and researchers will spend time sharing their knowledge with these youngsters, both on Zoom presentations and in the field. And getting to interact with other Young Birders can be life-changing. Here is the link to find out more and join the [Florida Young Birlder's Club](#).

Lighthouse Point Park Trip

OAS' next Young Birders field trip will be to Lighthouse Point Park near the Ponce Inlet jetty on Saturday, February 24th, from 8:30-11:30 a.m. There are shorebirds, gulls, terns and other birds and wildlife to explore at this beautiful beach park. Leaders will be Sherri Brown and myself. Registration is on our website: <https://orangeaudubonfl.org/field-trip-signup/>. The trip is free, but spots are limited. For more information, contact me at riglingkathy@gmail.com.

Kathy Rigling, Education Coordinator

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.

Following a great itinerary developed over the past several years, plans are to stay at the Tall Timbers Field Station, visit St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, St. George Island State Park, Wakulla Springs and other locations.

On last year's trip, the group saw over 130 bird species. The cost is \$300 for members; \$350 for non-members, and includes local expert guides, a Wakulla Springs boat tour and some picnic meals. Photos of last year's trip are in the [June OASis](#), p. 8. Register at this [link](#). For lodging and details, contact Teresa Williams at mwilliams@cfl.rr.com.



Top, Snowy Plover; Bottom, Bay-breasted Warbler, both at St. George Island State Park, Spring 2023 OAS Panhandle Trip. Photos: Brian Miller

Update Your Membership

The new year is a great time to join or renew your 3-way membership in Orange Audubon Society (OAS), Audubon Florida and National Audubon Society. Please pay directly to OAS, and we transmit the funds to National. If you want to include an additional donation, which goes to OAS, you can. The base rate is \$20 (\$15 for students). Go to OAS' website and click the [Join/Renew link](#). If you need your expiration date, email membership@orangeaudubonfl.org.

**2024 Chertok Contest
Deadline is April 18, 2024**

Orange Audubon Society's (OAS) Kit and Sidney Chertok Florida Native Nature Photography Contest promotes interest and concern for preserving the native fauna and flora of Florida. The deadline for the 36th annual contest is Thursday, April 18th (postmarked by or submitted electronically by midnight).

Subject matter must be native to Florida, images must not contain human components and must have been taken while complying with North American Nature Photography Association (NANPA) ethical field practices.

The three divisions are Youth (open to photographers 17 years of age or younger, as of the entry deadline), Novice and Advanced. You can enter up to five images. Entry fees for the Novice and Advanced Categories are \$10 per image for non-Audubon members, \$5



Whistling-Duck Liftoff—Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, 2023 Chertok Photo Contest, Youth Honorable Mention Winner, Photo: Matthew Chin

per image for Audubon members. For the Youth category, entry fees are \$4 per image for non-Audubon members and \$2 per image for Audubon members. Details, including prizes, will soon be posted on the OAS website [Chertok page](#). If any questions, email me at mwilliams@cfl.rr.com.

Teresa Williams, Photo Contest Chair

**Warblers and More in Ohio
May 13-18, 2024**

See neotropical birds in the peak of spring migration at what is described as “the Warbler Capital of the World” – Magee Marsh, on the south shore of Lake Erie. Orange Audubon Society's May trip with Wildside Nature Tours will provide excellent up-close opportunities for birders and photographers!

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 preview the beautiful birds we will see on this trip, tune in to our January 25th [Bird Chat on Wood Warblers of Ohio](#) by Tammy Martin.

FEBRUARY/MARCH CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Chats with OAS via Zoom

Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

**- Great Backyard Bird Count and City Nature Challenge
by the Bird Chats Team**

February 1, 2024

- Flamingos in Florida by Steven Whitfield

February 8, 2024

- TBA

February 22, 2024

**- The Life History of the Florida Sandhill Crane by
Stephen Nesbitt**

February 29, 2024

**- Pelagic Birding off the Florida East Coast by Michael
Brothers**

March 7, 2024

- Rehabbing with Raptor Feathers by Dianna Flynt

March 14, 2024

- American Oystercatchers by Janell Brush

March 28, 2024

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

Wekiwa Springs State Park Bird Survey

February 18, 2024

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Green PLACE Nature & Photography Hike

February 24, 2024

Contact Beth at (407) 836-1481

Young Birders to Lighthouse Point Park, Ponce Inlet

February 24, 2024

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Buscando Pajaros, Orlando Wetlands

March 9, 2024

Contact Deborah at info@orangeaudubonfl.org

Limited Edition Field Trip to Pine Meadows, Eustis

March 9, 2024

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Monthly Field Trip to Marl Bed Flats

March 16, 2024

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Wekiwa Springs State Park Bird Survey

March 17, 2024

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

**March Program: The Comeback of Lake Apopka by
Erich Marzolf (in-person)**

March 21, 2024

Contact Alan at alangrandiflora@gmail.com

Intermediate Bird Identification Two-Part Class

March 23 and 30, 2024

Contact Deborah at info@orangeaudubonfl.org