



Left, Roseate and Common Tern, Photo Michael Brothers. Right, Ring-billed Gull. Photo: Steve Shaluta, Michael Brothers with Audubon's Shearwater. Photo courtesy Michael Brothers

## Know Your Gulls and Terns by Michael Brothers January 16, 2025

Raucous Laughing Gulls are the only gulls that breed in Florida, but many more species are here in migration or for the winter. Identifying them is challenging due to different plumages at different life stages, but after Orange Audubon Society's January program, you will know more.

Relatives of gulls, the terns, have quite a few species breeding in our area — the Royal Terns, Sandwich Terns, Least Terns, Caspian Terns, Gull-billed Tern, Sooty Terns and Brown Noddies all breed in Florida according to our speaker. Many additional species are here in migration and winter. All of these species face challenges in finding safe breeding and wintering locations, since our shores are now so populated.

Orange Audubon is fortunate to host Michael Brothers, a gull and tern expert, for its January 16th in-person program at Leu Gardens. Michael is retired from the position of Director of the Marine Science Center in Ponce Inlet and leads pelagic birding expeditions off Florida and Georgia. He is a member of the Florida Ornithological Society Records Committee and is the Florida regional editor of the journal *North American Birds*. Michael illustrates his talks with great photos.

Bring your mystery gull or tern photos and all your natural history questions for Michael and prepare for a fascinating program.

*Alan Shapiro, Programs Chair*

**ORANGE AUDUBON SOCIETY programs are free. No reservations necessary.**



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Programs are the 3rd Thursday of each month (September–June) at 7:00 p.m. and all but December are at **Harry P. Leu Gardens in the Camellia Room** at 1920 North Forest Ave., Orlando, FL 32803

For map and directions, visit:  
[www.leugardens.org/plan/directions/](http://www.leugardens.org/plan/directions/)

## Birds of Prey Identification Trip, January 12, 2025

On Sunday, January 12th, 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 (separate) Birds of Prey Identification class will be February 2, 2025, again on the Wildlife Drive. What we find will be different each time.

Price for each is \$15 (Audubon members) or \$25 (non-members). To reserve your spot, visit [our website](https://orangeaudubonfl.org/field-trip-signup): <https://orangeaudubonfl.org/field-trip-signup>. Bob can be reached at (407) 459-5617.

## PEAR Park Field Trip January 18, 2025

Orange Audubon Society's first monthly free field trip of 2025 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 Max Weakley, Alan Shapiro and Glenn Blaser.

This field trip is free, but spots are limited to 15 participants. To reserve your spot, visit our website: <https://orangeaudubonfl.org/field-trip-signup/> and if questions, email [riglingkathy@gmail.com](mailto:riglingkathy@gmail.com)



Peregrine Falcon. Photo: Steve Shaluta

## No Black Bear Hunt!

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Wildlife Commission (FWC) is asking Floridians to share their thoughts on whether Florida should allow hunting of black bears. At a time when other environmental issues are threatening our way of life in the Sunshine State—including invasive species, loss of habitat, and plummeting wildlife populations—the FWC has many other pressing priorities.

Wekiwa Springs State Park is part of a corridor for bears and other wildlife between the Wekiva River Basin and the Ocala National Forest. With increased development, bear habitat has been eliminated, and bears were appearing in neighborhoods adjacent to the park and overturning garbage cans. Neighborhoods that purchased bear-proof trash cans for the entire community were able to quickly eliminate bear activity. [Bearwise community practices](#) work.

Audubon Florida has sent the alert that they need our need our voices, to tell the FWC that you do not support support a future bear hunt, especially when there are so many other, more important problems in Florida's environment to address first.

Are you signed up for the *Audubon Advocate* newsletter? Audubon Florida has excellent policy staff in Tallahassee interfacing with legislators and letting us know when it is important to speak up. At Audubon Assembly in early November, those in attendance had a chance to meet them and hear about their efforts.

The first legislative committee week in the run up to the 2025-2026 Legislative Session will begin on January 13, 2025. At the end of each committee week and each week of Session, Audubon Florida will keep us up to speed on the issues and let us know when our voices can make a real difference. In the latest Action Alert is information on legislation filed to protect Florida State Parks from development, an issue very important to all of us. Here's the link to speak up on the bear hunt: Action alert link: <https://act.audubon.org/a/bears2024>

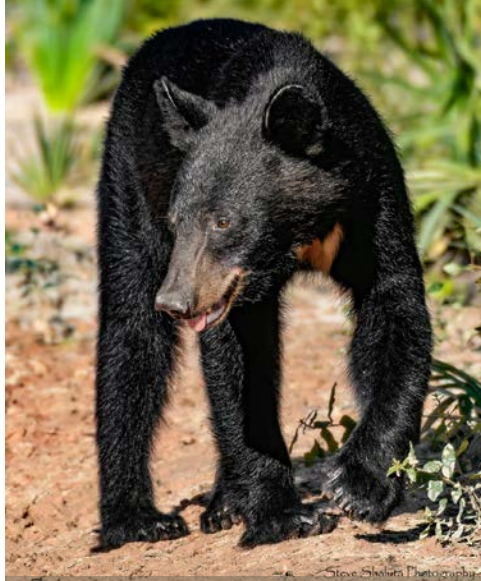
## Toward Our Nature Center and Endowment

Orange Audubon Society (OAS) secured its long-term lease from the City of Apopka for the 69.5-acre Apopka Birding Park, at the entrance to the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive, this March. We have been fundraising toward a nature center of our own since the early days of our 57-year history. Our mission — to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds and their habitats, for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity — will be greatly furthered by creating the Orange Audubon Nature Center at the Apopka Birding Park.

We are fund-raising toward construction of our energy-efficient, solar-powered renovated building, toward restoration of the Apopka Birding Park property into bird habitat *and* toward a sustainable endowment for operations. Large donations can fund parts of our building, such as the bird observatory annex, and come with naming rights. If you, or anyone you know, might want to explore possibilities, please email [info@orangeaudubonfl.org](mailto:info@orangeaudubonfl.org).

Donations to OAS are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law. For some of our members with IRAs, making qualified charitable distributions (QCD) directly to non-profits may count towards the required minimum distribution, thereby providing a significant tax benefit to you.

Please consult your personal tax advisor and IRA custodian to see if making a QCD will benefit you, and consider donating to Orange Audubon Society, Inc., an eligible 501(c)(3) nonprofit. We would be deeply grateful to receive your donation to further OAS' tax-exempt mission. Early in the year will help us as we choose our contractor and decide if we can move forward with construction. Thank you!  
*Deborah Green, President with Teresa Williams, Treasurer*



Black Bear - Ocala National Forest - 9/28/2024.  
Photo: Steve Shaluta



Orange Audubon Society (OAS) mission: To conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds and their habitats, for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity.

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The *OASis* (Orange Audubon Society information source) newsletter is published monthly, September–June, and posted on the OAS website. A link announcing new issues is e-mailed to subscribers.

Never miss out on OAS happenings. Add or update your email address by contacting [newsletter@orangeaudubonfl.org](mailto:newsletter@orangeaudubonfl.org).

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

JOIN OAS' [MEETUP](#) GROUP

LIKE OAS' [FACEBOOK PAGE](#)

OAS welcomes those who wish to volunteer and become more involved in our efforts.  
Email [volunteer@orangeaudubonfl.org](mailto:volunteer@orangeaudubonfl.org).

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## Donor Thank You

Since Orange Audubon Society (OAS) announced its long-term lease from the City of Apopka for the Apopka Birding Park this March and showed its initial plans in July, our donors have begun to step up.

Some of you are renewing your membership with an additional donation to Orange Audubon Society, and we will thank those of you separately.

OAS' nature center effort comes from our chapter and involves all of our members. We are profoundly grateful to those making monetary contributions. Others are or will be making donations of their time, and we will mention those in coming issues.

The Apopka Birding Park Working Group, that has kept this project going, consists of Orange Audubon board members Deborah Green, Jack Horton, Alan Shapiro, Susan Thome-Barrett, Kathy Rigling and Teresa Williams.

Generous donations during December were received from Linda and Richard Maxson, Alan Shapiro, Deborah Green, the Bond Foundation, Dr. Robert and Mary Dipboye, Shari and Stan Sujka and the Winter Garden 100 (WG100) men's charitable group.

Large in-kind donations were from Billy Butterfield of AmeriScapes Landscape Management Services, Michael Brothers, who has lead several trips to Disappearing Island that have raised significant funds, and all the trip leaders at the NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL who have allowed the festival to become a good fund-raiser as well as an educational and ecotourism effort (p.7).

Additional generous donations in December came from Joyce Bailo through Disney VoluntEARS, Linda Carpenter, Kathryn Fuller with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Sandra Giacalone, Lucy Langfield, Jeffrey Switzer, Andy Casey, Philip Donovan, Davey Frost, Rafael Gomez, Jim and Mary Helmers, Sheila Johnson, Andrew Mears, Janice Peterson, Leslie Poole, Cheryl Rainey, Yasmin Ritland, Angela & Stephen Withers, Gordon Wolfram, Susan Hoke, Jennifer Allen, Rick Baird, Alan and Susan Davis, Ryan Graham, Sam Kendall, Jurgen Lorenzen and Vicki Santello.

We would be deeply grateful to receive your [donation](#) as well, to further OAS' tax-exempt mission. Thank you!

*Deborah Green, President  
Teresa Williams, Treasurer*

## Family Photography Field Trip, February 23, 2025

Budding photographers, ages 8 to 17, can learn some photo tips from award-winning photographer Wei-Shen Chin and his children, who are also award winners in Orange Audubon Society's annual Chertok Florida Native Nature Photography Contest.

The date of this Family Photography Field Trip is Sunday, February 23, 2025, time: 8-11 a.m.. Location is Newton Park, Winter Garden, meeting at the main wooden dock.

This easily accessible park (not much walking needed) is full of Purple Gallinules that are otherwise tricky to find in Central Florida. Limpkins, terns, winter ducks and possibly raptors are also seen at this site.

Youth under 16 must be accompanied by a parent. Including both youth and adults, the trip will be limited to 20 participants. Price is \$5 for youth and \$5 for adults accompanying a youth under 16 years of age.

Orange Audubon is very fortunate to have the Chin family offering this workshop.

Wei-Shen Chin is an Orlando-based wildlife photographer. He began his career as a photojournalist in Cleveland, OH, shooting for UPI/Reuters and covering the Indians, Browns and Cavaliers. He was tutored by the late Ron Kuntz, then UPI bureau chief, and accompanied the late Lynn Pelham, Pulitzer Prize winning Time/Life photographer on many assignments. Wei-Shen later developed a successful business photographing weddings, corporate events, and annual reports. During the disruptive COVID epidemic, he turned his attention to wildlife photography and developed a love for capturing birds-in-flight, one of the most technically challenging aspects of wildlife photography. His work has been featured in many publications and websites including Orange Audubon, Florida State Parks and Oakland Heritage Center. He is most proud of his three children, Lauren, Nicole, and Matthew, who have also become award-winning photographers.

Lauren Chin, 17 years old, took up photography in 2018 when she asked her dad to use his compact Canon G7 while on vacation in Yellowstone. Once she caught the photo bug, she couldn't stop and would go on many car trips with her dad to the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive, often waking up before dawn. She soon graduated to the Nikon D850 and the Nikon 500mm f5.6 PF, which she used to capture her first awards in the 2021 Chertok Photo Contest Youth Category, an Honorable Mention (displayed as "Great Blue Heron in the Burr Marigolds") and a 4th place finish. She followed that up with top 3 finishes in 2022, 2023 and 2024. Her displayed image "Gift-wrapped Tricolor Heron" (p. 8) captured 1st place in the 2024 contest. She also won 3rd place in 2024 with "Delicious Dragonfly Snack". Her favorite camera/lens combo is the Nikon Z9 with the Nikkor 600mm f4 TC on a monopod.

Matthew Chin, 14 years old, first took up photography recording family trips to the Yellowstone and the Grand Tetons six years ago using a compact Nikon Coolpix S9900. As he developed his own style, he gravitated towards birds-in-flight, the most technically challenging images to capture. In 2021, at age 10, he won first, second and 5th place in Orange Audubon's Chertok photo contest Youth category, his first photo contest ever. He followed it up with top 4 placements in 2022, 2023 and 2024. His displayed image "Kingfisher Spread" won 2nd place in the 2024 Chertok Audubon Youth competition. His favorite camera lens combo is the Nikon Z9 paired with the 800mm f6.3 PF on a monopod. Although only 14, Matthew is also the product assembly supervisor for Photo Gear Designs Tracker 2.0 dotsight. We can appreciate Wei-Shen's pride in his children.

To sign up for this photo field trip, go to Orange Audubon's field trips sign up page and check member (for this field trip price for Youth and Adults is the same). Here is the link: <https://orangeaudubonfl.org/field-trip-signup/>.

After this field trip, your young photographer may want to enter the Chertok Florida Native Nature Photo contest, deadline April 30th. If you have any questions, contact Teresa Williams, Chertok Photo Contest Chair at [mwilliams@cfl.rr.com](mailto:mwilliams@cfl.rr.com).



Wei-Shen, Lauren and Matthew Chin at Newton Park. Photo courtesy Wei-Shen Chin

## April Trip to Panama

Orange Audubon Society is promoting a Birding Trip to Panama from April 2-9, 2025. Here's a chance to see the amazing Panama Canal and check it off your bucket list!

The trip is through Holbrook Travel, an established travel agency in Gainesville. Alan Shapiro, OAS 2nd Vice President, is organizing the trip. Time is very short on lining up the required number of people.



Harpy Eagle, Panama. Photo courtesy Holbrook Travel

If we can secure 11 participants, the cost of the trip will be only \$2925 each (and Orange Audubon will receive a large donation).

The price includes airport transfers, hotels, meals, van and driver, guide, plane rides in country, and admission fees. Airfare from the U.S., tips, and personal items are extra. Air service can be arranged through Holbrook Travel.

The itinerary, pricing, and trip description are on the Holbrook website at <https://holbrook.travel/as-pn25>. If you or anyone you know may be interested, please contact Alan as soon as possible at (352) 317-0089.

## Wild Birds Unlimited Donates New Baffles for Mead Feeders

Mead Botanical Garden's bird feeders have had quite a bit of wear and tear over the years. Jason Peliwo, owner of Wild Birds Unlimited, noticed that during the GROWvember Fall Fest and Plant Sale this past November and donated two new baffles. Lorri Lilja, birder and Wild Birds Unlimited employee, enlisted the help of Glenn Blaser to install the new baffles. Now everyone can enjoy the beautiful birds

Next time you are in Wild Birds Unlimited, thank them for updating the baffles and let them know how much we appreciate the work they do to help keep the Mead bird feeders full and looking good.

Susan Thome-Barrett

## IDEAL Program and Audubon in Action Grant

The "Inclusive, Diverse, Equitable, Accessible, Large-scale (IDEAL) Participatory Science" study looks at how groups can improve participation in participatory (citizen or community) science, to more closely represent the communities they serve and gain greater community support.

Orange Audubon Society (OAS) members Deborah Green, Kathy Rigling and Susan Thome-Barrett participated in bi-weekly training, along with others from the Audubon network around the country (September OASis, p. 3).

The IDEAL organizers targeted the Christmas Bird Counts to make more inclusive. Working on the Zellwood-Mt. Dora CBC with compiler Gallus Quigley, OAS was able to set up a new count section for the Apopka Birding Park.

Unfortunately, the Zellwood CBC is on a Thursday, which prevented participation in our Apopka Birding Park CBC by those who work or go to school during the week. We did have one college student and two Hispanic participants.

The Audubon in Action grant that OAS secured from National Audubon this past March has as its purpose to diversify participation in our efforts to restore habitat at the Apopka Birding Park. Contacts made in our efforts toward diversifying the CBC complement this effort.

## Lake Apopka North Shore Bird Surveys

The St. Johns River Water Management District's (District) 20,000-acre Lake Apopka North Shore was the site of systematic bird surveys from 2002 to 2015, coordinated by the District.

Participating in these surveys—in areas closed to the public—was very popular among local birders.

Orange Audubon has requested that the District revive the surveys, to document changes in bird species as the Lake Apopka and North Shore Restoration has proceeded. Interrupted by hurricanes, the surveys will be starting in January. Email [info@orangeaudubonfl.org](mailto:info@orangeaudubonfl.org), if you are interested in joining.

Deborah Green

## Apopka Birding Park Christmas Bird Count

Orange Audubon Society, as part off its participation in the IDEAL program to bring more representation into Audubon's Christmas Bird Count (CBC), held its first CBC on December 19th with the new Zone 3A of the Zellwood/Mt. Dora Christmas Bird Count.

The new Zone 3A was created specifically for us by compiler Gallus Quigley. The day started very foggy for the 8 participants who came out to look and listen for early morning birds. Two others joined the group an hour later, and while the fog stayed until 9:30 a.m., the group totaled 57 species including Swamp, Savannah and Grasshopper Sparrows, Wild Turkeys, and a Barred Owl. Over 150 American Robins flew over the Birding Park during the survey.

## Apopka Birding Park Bird Surveys Last Weekend of the Month

As Orange Audubon Society (OAS) works on the former nursery site, now called the Apopka Birding Park — that we are transforming to native vegetation and bird habitat,—we are documenting an anticipated increase in bird species.

Our first survey was in late August. The late September survey was cancelled due to Hurricane Helene, but surveys continued in October, November and December, with an average of 60 species seen each time.

Contact me if interested in joining our early morning monthly surveys. I will make sure you know where to meet. For 2025, we ask that you attend a Zoom program to know about our restoration and nature center plans and fill in a questionnaire with waiver. Email me at [alexdebear@icloud.com](mailto:alexdebear@icloud.com).

Alex DeBear



Zellwood Christmas Bird Count at the Apopka Birding Park, Photo: Deborah Green.



## Education Coordinator Update: Whole School Does Bird Survey

This month the focus of Orange Audubon's Education Program was getting ready for and conducting bird counts at Zellwood Elementary School and Wolf Lake Middle School.

These were to participate in the Zellwood-Mt. Dora Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on Thursday, December 19th, the annual date for this count.

Teachers showed their students a video I had developed, explaining the history of the CBC, basic ways to identify birds, how birds are counted scientifically and tips on using binoculars. At Zellwood Elementary, twenty classes ranging from kindergarten through 5th grade viewed this video.

At Wolf Lake Middle, I worked with the 6-8th grade agriscience classes. I visited those classes on December 10th and did a program about CBCs along with how to improve habitat for birds.

I brought bird feeders and supplies which were purchased through a grant from the IDEAL program (See September *OASis*, p. 3). I also instructed the students on how to create a habitat improvement plan.

The students were tasked with installing the feeders and bird bath prior to the CBC and designing a habitat improvement plan in the new year, including native plants we will provide through the grant.

Since we already completed the habitat improvements at Zellwood Elementary on their Beautification Day in November, I brought additional bird feeding supplies (purchased through the IDEAL grant) to the December meeting of their afterschool birding club. During this meeting of the birding club, I reviewed the history and procedures of the upcoming CBC.

On December 19th, we started the Christmas Bird Count at Zellwood Elementary school bright and early before school. The birding club which I visit monthly, the Green Club and the Garden Club participated. I was fortunate to have the assistance of long-time OAS member Terrie Leibler.

The before-school survey students were excited to see the increased activity of the birds, since we normally do our monthly bird counts after school.

When school started each grade level came outside to participate in a 30-minute count. We had up to 100 students at a time counting birds in their schoolyard. We used

the 33 pairs of binoculars from OAS (the last 22 purchased through the IDEAL grant and a National Audubon Collaborative Grant), as well as binoculars that Zellwood had from the FLEDJE grant and other sources.

For grades 2-5, the students worked together to spot the birds, and Terrie and I assisted in identifying them. The younger students counted the birds by color and completed a tally sheet. It was a great learning experience for all levels.

From 7:45 a.m.-12 p.m., we observed 31 species including some birds never seen on any of the previous monthly counts: a gorgeous Baltimore Oriole in their restoration area and a Yellow-throated Warbler in one of the mature oak trees.

The most encouraging thing for me was witnessing the excitement of so many students engaging with nature, as well as seeing the after-school birding club students showing leadership to help other students to find and identify birds.

Also, since I have done bird counts for 3rd grade for the past two years, the 4th and 5th grade students were commenting to me that they remembered what to do from their previous experience.

We saw a real Bald Eagle, the school mascot. Many students remarked that it was too short, and that they wanted to stay outside to keep counting birds!

That same afternoon, I traveled to nearby Wolf Lake Middle School to assist the 6th-8th grade agriscience students to count birds on their campus.

These students were brand new to this experience, but they were also very engaged and asked a lot of questions about the birds which we observed. Some highlights were a very cooperative Eastern Phoebe, very active Palm Warblers and an American Kestrel, spotted by a sharp-eyed student.

Orange Audubon still has availability to conduct on-campus bird surveys and other standards-based educational programs.

We also have a limited number of free class subscriptions for OCPS 3rd-5th grade classrooms of the engaging *Audubon Adventures* print publication. This high interest magazine not only supports standards-correlated science content but also aids literacy education, with both print and digital resources.

Our monthly free educational webinars will



Zellwood Elementary Christmas Bird Survey, December 2024. Photo: Pamela Owens, Middle: Zellwood Elementary's mascot is the Bald Eagle. Zellwood Elementary students observing Bald Eagle. Photo: Terrie Leibler

continue January 15th from 7:00-7:30 pm with a program about Sustainability for Schools. The link to sign up: <http://eepurl.com/imGskM>.

Email [education@orangeaudubonfl.org](mailto:education@orangeaudubonfl.org) to sign up for classroom or after school visits, or to request a class subscription to *Audubon Adventures* magazine.

*Kathy Rigling, Education Coordinator*



## Orlando Wetlands Festival

Coming up on Saturday, February 22, 2025, 9 am to 3 pm, is the wonderful Orlando Wetlands Festival, put on by the City of Orlando at Orlando Wetlands in Christmas, FL. Now being held only every two years, this festival has activities, walking and bus trips to learn about the wildlife of the Orlando Wetlands, booths and native plant giveaways. Orange Audubon Society has been a sponsor of this festival since its inception and will have a booth. If you are willing to help us, which may include selling nature merchandise, email [info@orangeaudubonfl.org](mailto:info@orangeaudubonfl.org).



Hooded Mergansers and Snowy Egrets feeding together. Photo: Deborah Green

## Birds Working Together

One of my favorite birding memories was from Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island in Southwest Florida. We were on the road along a waterway with mangroves between us and the water. Feeding along the edge of the mangroves were two unrelated species working together, an Anhinga and a Snowy Egret. The Anhinga swam underwater looking for fish and the Snowy walked along the edge adjacent to it, using its yellow slippers to stir up fish. This went on long enough that their collaboration was clearly a thing.

At the Apopka Amphitheatre, which birders call Fields of Fame, Hooded Mergansers are feeding collaboratively with Snowy Egrets, White Ibises and Double-crested Cormorants. Have you observed any such interspecies collaborations? We welcome nature observation stories. Email [info@orangeaudubonfl.org](mailto:info@orangeaudubonfl.org).

Deborah Green

## American Woodcock, alias Big-eye, Bog-snipe, Bog sucker ...etc

An unusual sandpiper that forages in dense woods, the American Woodcock has short legs, cryptic plumage, a long straight bill and a large head.

Unlike other sandpipers they are solitary and secretive and stroll around the forest floor probing the ground with their exotic bills searching for earthworms and other invertebrates.

Slightly larger than the American Bobwhite, this plump species has large eyes set back on the sides of its head so it can see danger in all directions. Their nostrils are placed high on their bills so they can breathe while probing the earth and their upper bills have a tip that can open and close while underground—all adaptations designed for extracting earthworms. What? How astonishing is this!

Woodcocks have a voracious appetite and can consume more than their weight in food each day. They also eat snails, spiders, flies, beetles, and ants. While foraging, they rock their bodies backwards and forwards, shifting their weight from foot-to-foot to make vibrations that prompt invertebrates to move and emit sounds the Woodcock can hear or feel.

Since male Woodcocks begin their courtship displays—or sky dancing—in the spring, the best time to find them is December through March at dawn or dusk. Difficult to locate in dim light, they make nasal buzz-calls at brief intervals from the ground as they prepare to show off for the females. They then fly upward in a wide spiral. When they get higher their wings start to twitter (as air passes through their feathers) and at a height of 200-300 feet the twittering becomes intermittent and the birds start to descend.

They zigzag down, chirping as they go and land silently near a female. Once on the ground they resume buzzing and the display begins all over again. I observed this magical ritual in Nebraska one evening at dusk. After waiting an hour in freezing weather, we heard a faint buzzing peent and about 20 male Woodcocks rose up from a dark field into the air to show us their stuff. It was amazing!

American Woodcock populations declined between 1966 and 2019 according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey. Woodcock are a popular game bird throughout the Eastern U.S. and hunters killed about 1.5 million per year in the 1970s; deaths decreased to about 170,000 in 2020.

Because they forage on the ground, Woodcocks can accumulate pesticides in their bodies from aerial spraying for insect pests. Their heavy diet of earthworms makes them vulnerable to lead, cadmium, and other heavy metal poisons.

Nature lovers have many colloquial nick names for the American Woodcock, such as timber doodle, Labrador twister, night partridge, bog-sucker, big-eye, mud bat and bog snipe. Check it out!

You will fall in love as I have with this charming design wonder. They winter in Central Florida and have been found at Orlando Wetlands Park and Wekiwa Springs State Park. Another avian species to amaze and delight!

Linda Carpenter



American Woodcock from Magee Marsh, Ohio. Photo: Joyce Stefancic



## 2024 NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL

Orange Audubon Society's 9th annual NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL was another great success! Our festival highlights the St. Johns River Water Management District's 20,000-acre Lake Apopka North Shore and other Central Florida birding hotspots. Over 5 days, December 5th through 9th, our fantastic volunteer leaders led 70 trips. Our out-of-town participants contribute to the local economy and may visit again after the festival. It is our great birding locations and our incredible trip leaders that make our festival grow and participants return year after year. Approximately 330 registrants participated this December, from 12 states plus 3 Canadian provinces.

Our post-festival questionnaire was filled out by 49 people and revealed that only 30.6% of those responding were new to the festival. From the same survey, we learned that 55.1% of respondents went to 1 or 2 field trips, 24.5% went to 3-4 trips and 14.3% went to 5 or more trips. A smaller percentage attended keynotes only. Anecdotally, we find that return registrants take more field trips since they know how things work. They also like to try the new offerings, which we try to come up with each year: a birding trip to Blue Spring State Park, Lake Woodruff National Wildlife Refuge, St. Augustine birding hotspots and Birds In Flight trips this year. Tricia Newton gave a drawing from nature workshop focused on waterfowl that was enthusiastically received.



Luis Gles and Mariah Hryniewich, popular trip leaders after their Best of the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive trip. Photo: Kathy Rigling. Max Weakley leads group at Emeraldalva Marsh. Photo: Steve Shaluta

Orange Audubon thanks our festival sponsors, many of whom have been with us every year since the beginning: The St. Johns River Water Management District welcomed us to hold field trips on their Emeraldalva and Hal Scott properties, as well as 28 trips on the Lake Apopka North Shore, thanks to the land managers Ben Guigliotti and Brian Silverman. The District also hosted our Saturday keynote at their beautiful Apopka Service Center, thanks in particular to Susan Davis. The University of Florida Mid-Florida Research and Education Center hosted our Friday keynote, thanks in particular to Dr. Lance Osborne. We also appreciate our sponsors KOWA Sporting Optics, Wildside Nature Tours, Woodstars Birding and Nature Tours, the Marine Discovery Center, Jim Cunningham Video Productions (see the great 3-minute clips on our website), Birding with David Simpson, Florida Wildlife Photo Tours, Phoneskope, Archaeopteryx Birding & Nature Tours, Guest Services (concessionaire at Wekiwa), Green Mountain Scenic Byway and Lake County.

The festival committee consists of OAS board members Mary Van Egmond, who stepped up with logistics this year, Jack Horton, Alan Shapiro, Kathy Rigling, Susan Thome-Barrett, Rick Baird and Teresa Williams. Volunteers for food service and merchandise sales included: Rick Baird, Jennifer Barber, Jennifer Coleman, Mo Cortese, Leslee Green, Carol Hebert, Gail Holdiman, Cynthia Kay, Marian Lichtler, Shawna Resnick, David Slongwhite, Melissa Steinberg, Susan Thome-Barrett and Teresa Williams. Scouting and additional field trip help came from Chris Newton, Lorri Lilja, Sam Mitcham and Mary Soule, as well as Jack Horton, Kathy Rigling and Susan Thome-Barrett. Although he couldn't participate this year, Gallus Quigley helped with planning.

Our 52 wonderful field trip leaders were Rebecca Anthony, Bill Asteriades, Brady Bailo, Gian Basili, Michael Brothers, Blair Clark, Steve Coleman, Alexander DeBear, Gigi DelPizzo, Lynn Marie Folts, Pamela Ford, Greg Gensheimer, Luis Gles, John Groskopf, Tim Hardin, Mitchell Harris, David Hartgrove, Chuck Honaker, Alice Horst, Jack Horton, Mariah Hryniewich, Peter Johnson, Melinda Klinger, Luddy Lambertson, Brennan Landreville, Lorri Lilja, Ed Maldonado, Jan Mercer, Eric Moore, Chris Newton, Tricia Newton, Christian Newton, Ben Powell, Kim Ramos, Matthew Richardson, Kathy Rigling, Ralph Risch, Delsy Rodriguez, Robert Sena, Steve Shaluta, Alan Shapiro, Scott Simmons, David Simpson, Mary Soule, Gary Steinberg, Susan Thome-Barrett, John Thomson, Craig Watson, Maxfield Weakley, Graham Williams and Danny Young. Thanks to all.

On behalf of the NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL, I am particularly proud of giving a chance to young trip leaders, who later go on to be trip leaders at larger festivals. For example, our extremely popular leaders Luis Gles and Mariah Hryniewich, whom we originally met at the Florida Keys Hawkwatch, led for our festival in 2024 for the 5th time. Luis and Mariah now have their own tour company, Woodstars Birding and Nature Tours, are reps of KOWA Sporting Optics

and PhoneSkope and are becoming well-known nationally. Maxfield Weakley is also just a few years out of college and proving himself a great leader, as is John Groskopf. Tim Hardin from Gainesville, called Tim Horton on the post-festival questionnaire, probably by one of our Canadian attendees, received enthusiastic reviews in his first festival appearance. Alex DeBear, 19, Blair Clark, 17, Haden Klinger, 15 and Ethan Landreville, 14 are even younger leaders at our festival. Through our Young Birders Club, Education Coordinator Kathy Rigling has mentored these Young Birders, and they are mirroring her skills in helping people find the birds.

The Big Day trips on Saturday, piloted at the 2023 festival as a competition between teams to see the most species, is very popular, and a shout-out to Chris Newton who spearheads this and many of the field trip efforts at our festival. This year the winning team was the Young Birders with 114 species. Led by John Groskopf and Kathy Rigling, the sharp-eyed Young Birders did not want to even come in for lunch or quit at the stated time. Our Friday night keynote speaker, Kyle Moon of Wildside Nature Tours, provided a fascinating glimpse into wildlife and wildlife photography at Yellowstone. And our Saturday speaker on flamingos in Florida, Dr. Steven Whitfield, brought from New Orleans through a sponsorship by past festival attendee Bud Younts, held an audience of 70 rapt. You can hear an earlier recording of his excellent talk on [our YouTube channel](#). Next year will be our 10th festival, and we have high hopes to have a nature center by then, which will allow actual exhibits. We are currently working to finalize the date, ideally the first weekend in December. If any questions, email [festival@orangeaudubonfl.org](mailto:festival@orangeaudubonfl.org)

*Deborah Green, Festival Chair*

## JANUARY/FEBRUARY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### **Bird Chats with OAS via Zoom**

Contact Deborah at [info@orangeaudubonfl.org](mailto:info@orangeaudubonfl.org)

#### **- Bird Banding and the Use of Trackers in the UK by Mike Drew**

January 9, 2025

#### **- TBA**

January 23, 2025

#### **- Florida Birds by Kirsten Hines**

January 30, 2025

#### **- Badgerland Birding by Ryan and Derek Sallman**

February 6, 2025

#### **- TBA**

February 13 and 27, 2025

### **Biggest Year Yet Field Trip**

January 4, 2025 (full)

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

### **Beginner's Bird Watching Class**

January 5, 11 and 25, 2025 (full)

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

### **Birds of Prey, Apopka**

January 12, 2025

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

### **Wekiwa Springs State Park Bird Survey, Apopka**

January 12, 2025

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

### **January Program: Know Your Gulls and Terns by Michael Brothers**

January 16, 2025

Contact Alan at [alangrandiflora@gmail.com](mailto:alangrandiflora@gmail.com)

### **Monthly Field Trip PEAR Park Conservation Area**

January 18, 2025

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

### **Apopka Birding Park Bird Survey**

January 25, 2025

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

### **Wekiwa Springs State Park Bird Survey, Apopka**

January 12, 2025

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

### **Oakland Nature Preserve Bird Survey**

January 26, 2025

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

### **Rock Springs Run State Reserve Bird Survey**

January 29, 2025 (tentative date)

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

### **Gainesville Birding Hotspots, Limited Edition**

February 1-2, 2025 (full)

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

### **Wekiwa Springs State Park Bird Survey, Apopka**

February 9, 2025

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559

### **Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) February**

February 14-17, 2025

<https://www.birdcount.org/>

### **Program: The Uniqueness and Conservation of the Wekiva Wild and Scenic River by Ashley Konon**

February 20, 2025

Contact Alan at [alangrandiflora@gmail.com](mailto:alangrandiflora@gmail.com)

### **Orlando Wetlands Festival**

February 22, 2025

Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

### **Youth Photo Workshop**

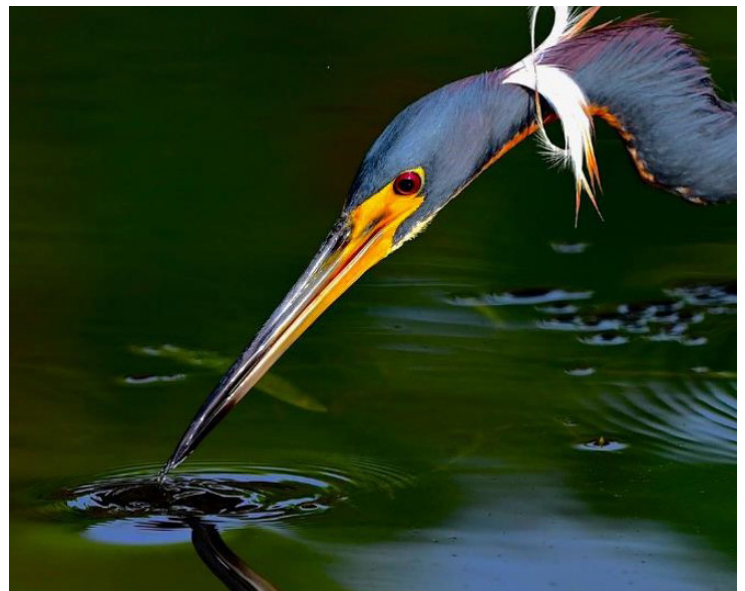
February 23, 2025

Contact Teresa at [mwilliams@cfl.rr.com](mailto:mwilliams@cfl.rr.com)

### **Apopka Birding Park Bird Survey**

February date TBA

Contact Kathy at (407) 488-9559



*Gift-wrapped Tricolored Heron. 2024 Chertok Photo Contest First Place Winner, Youth Category. Photo: Lauren Chin*

### **Get Out and Take Some Photos**

Orange Audubon Society's Chertok Florida Native Nature Photo Contest has a deadline of April 30th. It is never too late to start working to take some great shots. Choose your appropriate entry category: NOVICE: For new and less experienced amateur photo hobbyists. ADVANCED: For experienced photographers who have practiced and honed their skills over time. YOUTH: For participants 17 years of age or younger at time of entry.

Orange Audubon's November 21st program by Wayne Bennett had some great tips for improving your photography. You can watch that program on Orange Audubon's YouTube Channel [at this link](#).

The Chertok photo contest information page is [at this link](#).