



Clockwise, left to right: Abbie Harold, one of the Protected Species Technicians for the Orianne Center for Indigo Conservation, releasing a 2 year old Eastern indigo snake into a gopher tortoise burrow at approved release site in the Florida panhandle. Indigo Snake closeup. Dr. James Bogan with Indigo Snake. Photos: Steven Greene

Saving Indigo Snakes: The Orianne Project by Dr. James Bogan May 15, 2025

The Eastern indigo snake is the longest snake native to North America. Eastern indigo snakes are considered a lynchpin species for the longleaf pine ecosystem as they are generalist predators, which helps regulate other animal species populations. Their scientific name, *Drymarchon couperi*, roughly translates into "Emperor of the Forest", a fitting name for this apex predator. This presentation will review the natural history and conservation efforts of the Eastern indigo snake including health issues seen in captivity.

Our presenter Dr. James Bogan is the Chief Veterinary Officer for the Central Florida Zoo & Botanical Gardens as well as Director of the Central Florida Zoo's Orianne Center for Indigo Conservation. His certified expertise by the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners (ABVP) is in Canine and Feline Practice, Reptile and Amphibian Practice, and Fish Practice. Dr. Bogan's research interests include treatment options for gastric cryptosporidiosis in snakes and health evaluation in Eastern indigo snakes. He is currently a Past-President of the Association of Reptile and Amphibian Veterinarians, the Reptile and Amphibian Regent for ABVP, and the Program Chair for the Association of Zoos and Aquariums Eastern Indigo Snake SAFE (Saving Animals From Extinction).

He will be bringing one of these endangered snakes for us to see up close. Join Orange Audubon at Leu Gardens on May 15th, 7 p.m. for a fascinating program. All ages are welcome. Meeting details below.

Alan Shapiro, Programs Chair

ORANGE AUDUBON SOCIETY programs are free. No reservations necessary.



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

Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive 10th Anniversary

Orange Audubon Society (OAS) is proud to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive, a place that has given so much pleasure and solace to so many people locally and that has brought significant ecotourism income to West Orange County. This year we are joined by staff of the St. Johns River Water Management District, also proud of the impact of this place.

On Sunday May 4th, visit the Drive between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. and stop by our two stations -- near the pumphouse bridge and in the picnic shelter at Laughlin and McDonald (near the last porta-lets). District staff and OAS volunteers will be on hand with information on the restoration and bird identification. Bring your questions. The District will have some giveaways. Join us in celebrating!



Top, Birdapalooza Festival, circa 2014. Photos: Milton Heiberg. District bus ride at festival introducing people to the wonders of the North Shore, Photo: Bob Stamps. Otter viewing. Photo: Robert Sena

Legislative Report

Audubon Florida reports that although we are at the end of the Florida Legislative Session (officially ends May 2nd), amendments to bills are flying on the floors of both chambers. The budget is not yet finished, and there will be overtime or a special session before the new fiscal year starts July 1.

At the end of each week of Session, Audubon Florida updates us through the *Audubon Florida Advocate* newsletter and lets us know when our voices can help. If you have not done so already, please [sign up for the Audubon Advocate at this link](#), read it each week and respond to the requests to contact our legislators (or the Governor). There may still be last minute emails needed. Thank you! Our emails helped to take a bad Wetlands Mitigation bill off the House agenda. Thanks to everyone who engaged. A strong bill protecting our state parks passed unanimously in the House and Senate, and now goes to the Governor's desk. Protecting wetlands and protecting our parks were major issues for Audubon Florida, and Orange Audubon thanks the policy staff for their skillful communications with legislators on behalf of the environment.



Below, Audubon Florida Senior Director of Policy Beth Alvi testifying in committee on the state parks protection bill. Photo: The Florida Channel

Endangered Species Act in Jeopardy

The United States Department of Interior has proposed a change to the Endangered Species Act (ESA) that would gut protections for threatened wildlife. Since 1973, the ESA has stood as one of America's most successful

conservation laws, preventing the extinction of 99% of the species under its protection—from California condors to gray wolves to humpback whales. Now federal officials have proposed altering the ESA's long-understood definition of the word "harm" to no longer include habitat destruction.

The recognition that habitat loss can harm a species just as much as direct injury is a crucial component of the ESA's success. Unraveling this key protection strikes at the heart of wildlife conservation.

The newly proposed rule, called "Rescinding the Definition of 'Harm' Under the Endangered Species Act," is subject to a public comment period through May 19, 2025. We urge you to speak up in defense of the ESA now and submit your public comment. [Here is the link.](#)

Shingle Creek and St. Johns River Special Protection Areas

Orange Audubon had the opportunity to provide stakeholder input on the Wetlands Ordinance revisions done by Orange County two years ago. At the time, we asked for the St. Johns River and Shingle Creek to be given Special Protection Area status, along with the Econlockhatchee River, Wekiva River, and Environmental Land Stewardship Program.

We are pleased that Orange County has commissioned and is considering two exhaustive studies by Drummond Carpenter and Applied Ecology on Shingle Creek and the St. Johns River. Orange Audubon has written a letter in support of these two Special Protection Areas, and committee members are attending meetings in support.

Among the many good points in the studies is that developers following "open space" requirements are choosing golf courses and manicured grounds instead of leaving natural areas. Stronger requirements for preserving natural areas as open space are needed.

Sheryan Epperley Chester, Kristen Kosik and Orange Audubon Conservation Committee

Orlando Wetlands Visitor Center Now Open!

Hear all about what's new at the Orlando Wetlands and about the beautiful recently opened Visitor Center on the recent Bird Chat with Mark Sees, now posted on Orange Audubon's YouTube channel. Put Orange Audubon Society in the YouTube search bar to find our channel or [use this link](#).



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.

For other membership information, contact: 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.

Orange Audubon Society, Inc. is a Florida not-for-profit organization, tax exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

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Nature Center Update

Do you work for a company that might want its name on part of a beautiful building at the entrance to the extremely popular Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive, a site visited by both locals and people from around the country and world?

Or do you have other ideas or contacts that could help Orange Audubon in our fundraising toward our nature center? You can share this [naming rights](#) flyer and contact us at info@orangeaudubonfl.org.

For an all-volunteer organization, with just one part-time employee, Education Coordinator Kathy Rigling, Orange Audubon accomplishes a tremendous amount. Many of our activities are now described on our updated nonprofit profile on the Central Florida Foundation website ([link here](#)).



Progress on the Nature Center:

Last March we secured our 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. Our wonderful architect Philip Donovan and his team at Little Diversified Architectural Services have completed design for the renovation of the old cement block truck shop into a beautiful nature and environmental education center. The building will be certified under the United States Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program and is tracking Gold level. In addition to energy efficient design, it will have solar panels on the roof and a 200-gallon cistern. Collected rainwater will go through filtration and be used for toilet flushing. The construction designs are already permitted through the City of Apopka. Fundraising continues prior to our being able to start construction.

Progress on the Habitat Restoration

Orange Audubon continues making plans to restore our disturbed nursery site into better upland bird habitat. Volunteers are surveying and planning for which of the concrete pads—that were the bases of the old greenhouses from nursery days—we should save and which have to be taken out. A Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission grant to treat the invasive cogongrass was secured and a spring spraying has been done. Cogongrass, *Imperata cylindrica*, is a highly invasive grass species considered one of the

world's worst weeds due to its aggressive spread and ability to displace native vegetation. We will be applying for continued funding under this FWC Uplands grant program until the cogongrass is in control.

Orange Audubon has requested to have a Forest Stewardship Plan developed for us by the Florida Forest Service. This process will also involve the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, since our objectives are restoring wildlife habitat.

Soil tests are being taken. Since we are big fans of the longleaf pine wiregrass sandhill habitat at Wekiwa Springs State Park, a habitat that has almost disappeared within its original range in the South, we are seeking expert advice as to whether our birding park could support sandhill species. The Forest Stewardship Plan will help us plan our habitat restoration.

Your Contributions Really Help

OAS' nature center effort comes from our chapter, and we are profoundly grateful to those making monetary contributions. Generous donations in April were received from Eric Pearson in memory of Sue Byrd Pearson, Jeffrey Switzer, James Adamski and Jacob Richardson.

Donations to OAS are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law. [You can donate online at this link](#) or mail checks to Orange Audubon Society, P.O. Box 941142, Maitland, FL 32794.

Monthly donations

Many of our members are Sustainer members of National Audubon, with online monthly donations. Orange Audubon now has the ability to receive monthly donations on our website and these [donations](#) can be used toward our nature center and educational efforts.

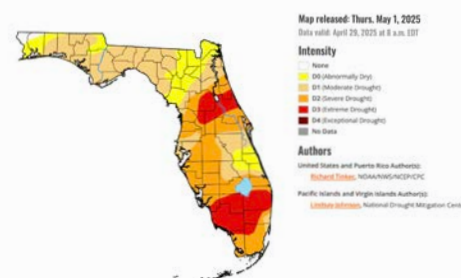
For those with IRAs who are over 73 years of age, making qualified charitable distributions (QCDs) directly to non-profits, including Orange Audubon, may count towards your required minimum distribution, providing a significant tax benefit. QCDs can already be made for the 2025 tax year.

Donations coming in early will help us as we choose our contractor and decide when we can move forward with construction. Thank you!

*Deborah Green, President with
Teresa Williams, Treasurer and
Sue Weidner, Assistant Treasurer*

Still in a Drought: Please Conserve Water

Florida's dry season is generally October to late April, but this year's drought may not break for awhile. Over the last 60 days, most of the central and southern Florida Peninsula received less than half of normal rainfall, with a few areas recording less than one-quarter of normal.



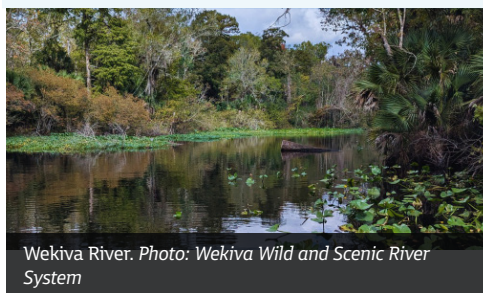
Map: National Drought Mitigation Center <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/CurrentMap.aspx>

This year's dry conditions are due to a combination of persistent high-pressure systems, below-normal rainfall and the La Niña pattern. La Niña is where colder-than-average ocean water in the equatorial Pacific Ocean leads to drier and warmer conditions in winter and spring in Florida.

As temperatures increase and rainfall lags behind plants' water needs, people crank up their irrigation. All the withdrawals affect our Florida springs.

Here are ways to help:

- Make sure you have a functioning hose nozzle for hand watering.
- Hand water only when necessary (when plants are wilted) and not during hours of high evaporation.
- If you have an automatic irrigation system, know your St. Johns River Water Management District watering restriction irrigation days.
- Use a rain sensor device or turn the system off when it rains or has rained.
- For irrigation system tune-ups, choose a contractor who is a certified member of the Florida Irrigation Society, www.fisstate.com.



Wekiwa River. Photo: Wekiwa Wild and Scenic River System



PANAMA

Panama | Birding Central Panama and the Darién Lowlands

with **Orange Audubon**

February 18-28, 2026



Trip includes a donation to Orange Audubon

Panama boasts the highest diversity of bird species in Central America, so the country's advantageous location at the convergence of two continents makes it the prime respire for migratory birds from both North and South America. Embark on an unforgettable 11-day birding journey across several fascinating regions of Panama, including the country's easternmost province of Darién. Visit well-known birding trails, tropical rainforests, wetlands, mudflats, and much more. Enjoy the chance to explore not only noteworthy public and private reserves, but also witness the Panama Canal's Miraflores Locks in action, and learn about Panama's role as an international trade center and its many historical sites.

Program Highlights

- Discover two of Panama City's stunning natural areas, the Metropolitan Natural Park and the Panama Bay Mudflats, for encounters with fascinating wildlife, especially shorebirds.
- Venture into the Darién Province's many birding hotspots, including the San Francisco Reserve, Chucunaque River, El Salto Road, and the Yaviza wetland, to see some of the country's hundreds of bird species like the Crimson-bellied Woodpecker, Black Oropendola, Red-throated Caracara, and Harpy Eagle.
- Meet members of the Indigenous Wounaan community and learn about their traditions, culture, and botanical culture.
- Hike the world-famous Pipeline Road, where target species include Black Hawk-Eagle, Purple-throated Fruitcrow, Masked Tityra, the coveted Blue Cotinga, and hundreds of others.
- Explore Soberania National Park, one of the country's most accessible tropical rainforests and home to an impressive list of 525 bird species.
- Visit a sloth rescue center, meet animal ambassadors and learn about wildlife rescue, rehabilitation, and release during canal expansion.

Land Cost- \$3495

For more information contact:

Alan Shapiro 352-317-0089
Alangrandiflora@gmail.com

or

Lisa Palmese-Gruabard 800-451-7111
lisa@holbrooktravel.com

Mead Botanical Garden Spring Bird Walks

Each Saturday in April for the past 14 years, Orange Audubon Society has hosted free bird walks at Mead Botanical Garden in Winter Park.

Songbirds pass through Central Florida en route to forests of the Appalachians, the northeastern U.S. and Canada, after wintering in the Caribbean or Central or South America. Mead is a great migrant trap, supplying insects and berries to eat and shelter in a variety of habitats — including open water, wetlands and uplands with oaks and tall pines.

Weather was good enough this spring that most of the birds could keep flying north instead of stopping over, so it wasn't the best migration season. Participants still had a lot of fun. We had over 100 birders attend from Central Florida, Miami area, Michigan,



Mead Botanical Garden Spring Bird Walk, April 19, 2025. Photo: Kathy Rigling.

Indiana, Texas, Mexico and the Bahamas. Highlights were a Golden-winged Warbler and Blue-winged Warbler, Yellow-billed Cuckoo and the baby owls.

Thanks to Matt Richardson, Chuck Honaker, Jimena Aguire, Haden Klinger, Alan Shapiro, Glenn Blaser and Susan Morris for leading and to Linda Gaunt for coordinating.

World Migratory Bird Day, Birdcast and Lights Out

World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) is celebrated on May 13th throughout the U.S. and Canada. Songbirds and other birds that passed through our area in April are now reaching Northern states and Canada where they will breed..

Most birds migrate at night, using the stars and the moon to aid navigation. Free of daytime thermals, the atmosphere is more stable, making it easier to maintain a steady course, especially for smaller birds such as warblers that may fly only 15 miles per hour.

BirdCast uses Doppler weather radar data—featured in weather broadcasts—to accumulate information on the numbers and flight directions of birds aloft in order to better understand migratory bird movements.

BirdCast wants us to be aware that bright lights attract and disorient nocturnally migrating birds, potentially causing fatal collisions with buildings or exposure to additional day time hazards.

You can help protect birds that pass through your region by turning off all non-essential lighting from 11:00PM until 6:00AM.

Orange Audubon Conservation Committee

Apopka Birding Park Bird Surveys

As Orange Audubon works on the former nursery site, now called the Apopka Birding Park — that we are transforming to native vegetation and bird habitat— volunteers are documenting an anticipated increase in bird species. During our monthly Apopka Birding Park bird surveys, trails are being carved out. Email Alex at alexdebear@icloud.com to join us.

North Shore Bird Survey May 13, 2025

The St. Johns River Water Management District's (District) 20,000-acre Lake Apopka North Shore was the site of the District's systematic bird surveys from 2002 to 2015. Pam Bowen, Joy Marburger and Jim Peterson of the District coordinated bird surveys that Orange Audubon publicized and that many of our members joined. Surveys were popular among birders, as it was a rare opportunity to bird by vehicle in different parts of the North Shore.

Orange Audubon requested a resumption of the surveys to document changes in bird species composition as restoration of the North Shore has proceeded.

Orange Audubon anticipates that species diversity will have increased as the property has been restored from farm fields to native vegetation, with more natural water flows.

A specific transect methodology is being followed, and eBird will be used to record data. Routes will be assigned on a lottery system, following arrival at the McDonald Canal Boat Ramp, 24600 CR 448A, Mount Dora (Astatula), FL 32757. At least 2 people will be in each survey team, with at least one experienced birder. With 12 survey routes, 24 people are needed.

Meeting time is 6:30 a.m., and the surveys will extend from 7 am to noon. Surveys are

Florida Panhandle Trip

Orange Audubon Society's trip to see migratory and breeding songbirds and shorebirds in the Florida Panhandle was another success. Some great birds were seen, with number of species still being tabulated. Thanks especially to Jim Cox at Tall Timbers Research Station for showing us how Brown-headed Nuthatches and others are banded and showing us beautiful old growth longleaf pine forests.

Teresa Williams



Kentucky Warbler. Tall Timbers Research Station.
Photo: Brian Miller

held on the 2nd Tuesday of each month continuing June 10th, July 8th, August 12th and September 9th. Registration with waiver must be filled out for the season [using this link](#).

After registering online and signing the waiver, email info@orangeaudubonfl.org and dexterdevon68@gmail.com to RSVP for the specific date.

The 20,000-acre Lake Apopka North Shore is a magnet for resident, overwintering and migratory birds, so birding there is always fun.

If surveys are above your birding level and interest, don't forget to mark your calendar for the NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL, which provides guided access to the North Shore. Revised dates (due to booking of the Wekiwa Springs State Park Youth Camp) are December 11-15, 2025

Chris Newton, Survey Coordinator, with Ben Gugliotti, District Land Manager and Deborah Green, Orange Audubon President



Young Birders Club trip to Mead Botanical Garden, April 12, 2025. Photos: Deborah Green.

Young Birders Club

Orange Audubon's April 12th Young Birders field trip to Mead Botanical Garden to search for spring migrant songbirds was a lot of fun.

The Young Birders Club is for 8 to 17-year-old youth interested in learning more about birds. Those under 16 must be accompanied by an adult.

Thanks to Lorri Lilja, Haden Klinger and Kathy Rigling for leading.

On May 10th, Orange Audubon will host a joint trip with the Florida Young Birders Club to Orlando Wetlands. We will look for late spring migrants, nesting birds and more.

A light lunch will be provided. The trip is FREE but advanced registration [on our website](#) is required, and space is limited. Loaner binoculars will be available. For more information contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com.

April Outreach Appreciated

Orange Audubon again had a booth at Central Florida Earth Day on Lake Eola this April. Thanks to Jaliza Almeida, Rick Baird, Deborah Green, and Emily Loescher Wright for doing the outreach. Emily has been an intern through the Stetson University Institute of Water and Environmental Resilience and The Nature Conservancy.

The last weekend of April was the Apopka Art & Foliage Festival. Thanks to Jaliza Almeida, Rick Baird, Deborah Green, David Slongwhite, Hannah Summersill and Emily Loescher Wright for staffing Orange Audubon's outreach at that event. We made some good contacts with interest in the Apopka Birding Park and recruited a few volunteers.

Thanks also to Rick Baird for staffing a booth at Earth Day at Valencia College.

Deborah Green



2025 –2026 Orange Audubon Society Elections

Every year Orange Audubon Society (OAS) holds its Board elections at the April program meeting.

OAS' efforts have been enhanced by the part-time employment of our Education Coordinator Kathy Rigling since January 2022. But OAS is a basically an all-volunteer run chapter with a working board that leads our many activities, with the assistance of other non-board volunteers when possible.

With sustainability of our chapter in mind, OAS now has a Succession Plan. Our longest-serving board member, OAS Treasurer Teresa Williams, will pass the baton on July 1st to current Assistant Treasurer Sue Weidner.

Sue, like Teresa, is a certified public accountant and became involved with OAS several years ago through volunteering as a Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive Ambassador. She will be managing OAS finances using QuickBooks, following groundwork laid by Teresa.

Teresa, who has just completed OAS' first financial audit, is busy with the Chertok Photo Contest entries and will be recognized for her long service in next month's issue. OAS' Succession Plan also includes replacement of long-time president Deborah Green with a paid Executive Director; and we are actively fundraising to create a sustainable funding stream for that position.

OAS is following the model of several other large Audubon chapters in Florida that have replaced a long-serving president with an Executive Director, hiring someone from their board who was recognized to have the required skills as well as knowledge of the organization.

When we approach our members asking for donations, it is for sustainable operations, including salaries, as well as for our beautiful planned nature center.

OAS was founded as a non-profit 501(c)(3) chapter of National Audubon in 1966, has grown to be the second largest chapter in Florida and plans to be around fulfilling our mission for as long as we can. Planning ahead is critical.

Our newest board member Hannah Summersill comes to us as a LAWD Ambassador and outreach volunteer. She has a financial background and will join OAS' finance committee. Welcome Hannah!

Officers for the 2025-26 season will be:

- President – Deborah Green
- 1st Vice President – Jack Horton
- 2nd Vice President – Alan Shapiro
- Secretary – Linda Gaunt
- Treasurer – Sue Weidner

Board Members (Non-Officer) will be:

2025 – 2026 term

- Teresa Williams
- Alex De Bear
- Hannah Summersill
- Susan Thome-Barrett

2025 – 2027 term

- David Bottomley
- Linda Carpenter
- Brent Mobley

2025 – 2028 term

- Rick Baird
- Eric Moore
- Mary Van Egmond

I thank my nominating committee members Mary Soule and Robert Sena for their assistance.

Rick Baird, Nominating Chair

Looking For Volunteers

Do you have time and a passion for volunteering? Orange Audubon is looking to expand its existing base of Orange Audubon member volunteers. Here are volunteer opportunities:

- Meal, Hospitality, and Logistics support for our Signature Events: Chertok Florida Native Nature Photography Contest (June 19) and NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL (December 11-15)
- Helping our Education Coordinator with school events
- Hospitality at our monthly in-person programs at Leu Gardens, 3rd Thursdays, 6pm
- Joining the elite group of Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive Ambassadors to welcome visitors to the Drive
- Assisting with clean-up, planting, etc. for our future Orange Audubon Nature Center at the Apopka Birding Park

The [Get Involved](#) tab on our website has a survey to let us know of your interests. Or just email volunteer@orangeaudubonfl.org. Thank you!

Mary Van Egmond

Earth Day Cleanup

Orange Audubon Society was requested to host an afternoon volunteer workday by Planet Fitness, Orlando on Earth Day, April 22nd at the Apopka Birding Park. A great time was had by all, and we got a lot done! We plan another workday on a weekend before it gets too hot. Email volunteer@orangeaudubonfl.org to participate.



Top, Volunteers cleaning up the Apopka Birding Park building area. Second, volunteers in the oak hammock, removing invasive asparagus fern and *Syngonium*. Third, Lance Hart, retired St. Johns River Water Management District wetlands scientist, telling our volunteers from Planet Fitness about the Lake Apopka restoration. Fourth, Some of our volunteers. Photos: David Rosado, Planet Fitness

Education Coordinator Update

April was another busy month for Orange Audubon's education programs. I presented or interacted with 276 adults and 1,266 students from grades kindergarten through 9th grades. This was at 12 different schools and 45 different classrooms, including bird counts, bird beak adaptation activity, food chain/food web lesson, characteristics of birds and a habitat lesson.

I presented three after school programs, including the monthly bird club at Zellwood Elementary. I also did my monthly visit to a homeschool program.

I tabled at 4 different evening events at schools including family STEM nights, an Everglades night, an Eco and Wellness Expo and an Earth Day Expo.

At Wolf Lake Middle School, using the IDEAL program grant funding, Orange Audubon was able to help the students install a native plant garden and bird feeding area. Alan Shapiro taught the students how to properly install and care for the new plants, and I shared with the students the value of native plants to the ecosystem. Plants were purchased at a discount from Green Isle Gardens in Groveland.



Wolf Lake Middle School native plant garden planting event. Photos: Jennifer Bennett

At the end of this month Orange Audubon had given away all of our budgeted class subscriptions to *Audubon Adventures*, which totaled 31 classrooms. At the League of Environmental Educators of Florida Spring mini-conference, I presented a session on birding and participatory science.

I would like to thank the following for volunteering: Terrie Leibler, Susan Thome-Barrett and Randy McCall for helping with

Brown-headed Cowbird, A Handsome Parasite

In April a ravenous pair of Brown-headed Cowbirds discovered the white millet I had put in a bower for the Painted Buntings. I had never seen Cowbirds in my yard, and I watched in horror as they devoured the millet, nuts, milo and sunflower seeds in my feeders. Furthermore they were not easily discouraged. Tapping a window or waving my arms didn't faze them. They returned in minutes, gobbling and splattering millet in all directions. This species already had a bad reputation in my book because of their deceptive breeding strategy called "brood parasitism." The females, who can produce three dozen eggs a year, lay their eggs in the nests of other birds and the foster parents incubate the eggs and feed the young Cowbirds, even as the Cowbird chicks crowd out the parent's own eggs, and even as the Cowbird nestlings grow larger than the foster parent.

Ornithologist David Sibley corrected my thinking on this. "The female Cowbird does not choose to lay her eggs in the nests of other birds—that's just the way Cowbirds have evolved ... she seeks every advantage for her offspring." A clever strategy certainly as Cowbirds lay their eggs in the nests of 220 species of birds; however this adaptation threatens avian species with small populations like the Kirkland's Warbler.

Some birds, such as the Yellow Warbler, can recognize Cowbird eggs but the Warblers are too small to remove them from their nests. Instead they build a new nest over the top of the old one and hope the Cowbirds don't return. Some larger species puncture or grab Cowbird eggs and throw them out of their nests; however, the majority of hosts don't recognize Cowbird eggs at all.

Nevertheless these are handsome birds, much prettier than ones I have seen in local pastures. Although described as "stocky" blackbirds, the males in my yard were about 7 inches long and had sleek, glossy black bodies with green and blue iridescent undertones and rich brown heads. The females were dull, pale gray-brown, with a streaked breast. The species gets their name from their symbiotic relationship with grazing livestock that flush up insects for the birds to eat.

Brown-headed Cowbirds are common year-round across most of North America and of low concern to conservationists who estimate their global breeding population to be 130 million. The evolution of an optimal brooding strategy has apparently ensured their survival. Check out these clever birds and their fascinating reproductive strategies. There is much to learn about avian life in Florida!

Linda Carpenter



Above, Brown-headed Cowbird males. Below, Brown-headed Cowbird, female. Photos: Joseph Mileyka

student bird counts; Alan Shapiro for picking up the plants and providing advice and instruction at Wolf Lake Middle School for their habitat improvement project; ; Kai Sterk and Jaliza Almeida for assisting at school STEM family nights.

Please email education@orangeaudubonfl.org to sign up for classroom and other types of educational programming.

Kathy Rigling, Education Coordinator

If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder without any such gift from the fairies, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in.

Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder*

MAY/JUNE CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Chats with OAS via Zoom

Contact Deborah at info@orangeaudubonfl.org

Lynds Jones, Early Ornithologist by Dianna Steele

May 8, 2025

Zoo-based Conservation by Steffanie Munguía

May 22, 2025

Importance of Native Landscaping by Mac Camacho

May 29, 2025

Birds of Vieques, Puerto Rico by Daphne Gemmill

June 5, 2025

TBA

June 12, 2025

Rock Springs Run State Park Bird Survey, Apopka

May 1, 2025

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Limited Edition Field Trip to Emeraldal Marsh

May 3, 2025

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Wekiwa Springs State Park Bird Survey, Apopka

May 4, 2025

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive 10th Anniversary Celebration

May 4, 2025

Contact Deborah at info@orangeaudubonfl.org

Baby Owl Shower at Center for Birds of Prey, Maitland

May 10, 2025

Contact Teresa at mwilliams@cfl.rr.com

Young Birders End of Year Birding at Orlando Wetlands

May 10, 2025

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

World Migratory Bird Day

May 13, 2025

Contact Deborah at info@orangeaudubonfl.org

North Shore Bird Survey

May 13, 2025

Contact Alan at alangrandiflora@gmail.com

Monthly Program: Saving Indigo Snakes: The "Orianne" Project by Dr. James Bogan

May 15, 2025

Contact Alan at alangrandiflora@gmail.com

June Challenge Kick Off Trip

June 1, 2025

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Oakland Nature Center Bird Survey, Oakland

June 7, 2025

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Wekiwa Springs State Park Bird Survey, Apopka

June 8, 2025

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

City Nature Challenge 2025



Over 200 people participated in the 2025 City Nature Challenge, Orange County. Orange Audubon

had help in publicity from Stetson University's Institute for Water and Environmental Resilience, along with The Nature Conservancy. With thousands of observations made around the world, the CNC is a great way to document biodiversity using [iNaturalist](#), a free app available across all mobile devices. During the first week of May, experts and novices alike will be working on identification of the observations. So final results are not be available by press time, but we will post next month. To see all, [go to this link](#).

June Challenge Kickoff is June 1st

The June Challenge was started by Alachua Audubon to encourage birders to get out and search for birds during one of the traditionally difficult birding months of the year, June. The goal is to pick a local county and try to see as many native bird species as possible. It is required to see the bird, not necessarily hear it. No recorded calls may be used.

June Challenge is a great way to see our breeding species. Orange Audubon Society is offering a trophy to the member who sees the most native birds from June 1st through 30th.- The two categories for this competition are 18 and under and over 18.

To kickstart the June Challenge we will have a Limited-Edition field trip on Sunday, June 1st at the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive from 7:00- 11:30 a.m. We are excited to feature two new young leaders Haden Klinger and Jimena Aguirre assisting with this trip. Traditionally June 1st is one of the best dates to get a great head start on the June Challenge while some migrant birds may still be around. Registration is now open on our website and spots are limited.

More details about reporting your findings for June Challenge will be posted in the June OASIS.

Kathy Rigling



June Challenge 2024 winners, Ethan Landreville, Haden Klinger, Kathy Rigling, Lorri Lilja and Jennifer Tedrow. Photo: Melinda Klinger

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

Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*