



Left to right, Red Fox, baby Opossum, Debbie Helsel with Barred Owl. Photos courtesy Back to Nature



Rehabilitating Native Animals by Debbie Helsel, Back to Nature Monday, April 13, 2026 (Note: Changed date)

Back to Nature Wildlife Refuge was founded in 1989 by Carmen M. Shaw to rescue, raise, rehabilitate and release Central Florida's Native Wildlife.

As the largest wildlife rehabilitation facility in Central Florida, this nonprofit is supported by Orange County. In 2014, Back to Nature moved to the Lake Nona area in its current 20-acre Eagle's Roost location.

Our April presenter Debbie Helsel grew up playing in the woods near her Pennsylvania home. In 1990, she began working for Orange County Animal Services while volunteering for Back to Nature. When a paid position became available, she left her job at the county and followed her heart. She has served as Executive Director at Back to Nature since 1999.

As pointed out by staff, "The dedication needed to care for (sometimes) over 300 animals at a time, doesn't end at 4pm and often occurs even on our days off. Round the clock care is required for many animals, which demands us to bring them (infant wildlife) into our homes at night, to be fed anywhere from every 2-4 hours. It's our love for them and the desire to promote public awareness of our furry, feathered and scaly friends that keeps our team going."

If you visit Back to Nature (open Tuesday through Sunday), you can to see over 25 different species as well as learn about our local environment. Location is one of Orange County's Green PLACE properties, Eagles Roost, 10525 Clapp Simms Duda Rd., Orlando, FL 32832.

Note that the program date is changed from our usual third Thursday date, due to an overbooking at Leu Gardens. We hope you can join us on Monday, April 13th at 7pm (address below). The program is suitable for children and animal lovers of all ages.

Alan Shapiro, Programs Chair

ORANGE AUDUBON SOCIETY programs are free. No reservations necessary.



ORANGE
AUDUBON

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/

2026 Chertok Photo Contest Deadline, April 16, 2026

It's time to pick your favorite Florida native nature photos and enter! Deadline is April 16th.

The Kit and Sidney Chertok Florida Native Nature Photography Contest was created 38 years ago to promote interest and concern for preserving the native fauna and flora of Florida and to enhance enjoyment of Florida's natural wonders through photography. Winners will be announced and prizes awarded at our June 18th program.

To encourage young photographers, Orange Audubon has a Youth category (open to photographers 17 or younger, as of the entry deadline). Adults can enter the Novice or Advanced categories.

Subject matter must be native to Florida and images must not contain human components. Images also must have been taken complying with ethical field practices of the North American Nature Photography Association (NANPA). In contrast to photo clubs, NANPA, founded by Roger Tory Peterson, focuses on environmental issues and advocates for nature photographers on issues from intellectual property to public land.

NANPA ethical standards include

- Learn patterns of animal behavior, so as not to interfere with animal life cycles
- Respect the routine needs of animals.

Images will be screened and photographers notified of disqualified images with instructions for submitting replacements.

Entry forms, online or printable, are [available on our website](#). If you have questions, contact me at (407) 718-1977 or mwilliams@cfl.rr.com.

Teresa Williams, Chertok Committee Chair



Parenting is Hard Work—Great Egret with Chick, 2025 Chertok Florida Native Nature Photo Contest, Youth Category, Honorable Mention. Photo: Easton Addison



Progressing Toward Construction

Thank you so very much to the nearly 100 donors who contributed so far in

2026 towards Orange Audubon's nature center efforts on a 69.5 acre old nursery site adjacent to the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive. As you know, we are working to restore upland habitat, with walking trails and nature immersion amenities for the community, and to build a learning place about sustainability.

Update on the \$600K in 60 day campaign

Over \$80,000 has come in since we started our 60 day campaign in February (with another \$13,000 before we announced the campaign in January). This is a long way from our \$600K goal, but is still some of the best fundraising that Orange Audubon has done to date. For example, last year in the 6 months from July through December, donations were just over \$81,000.

Please donate if you haven't already. Here is recent progress by our all-volunteer team:

The building

- The hiring of our building contractor will be this month. Two local contractors who have previously worked with our architect, Philip Donovan of Little Diversified Architectural Consulting, are competing. Both have experience with small projects and LEED certification.
- Construction costs have risen since we first secured our architect's design and price estimate two years ago. We hope the costs can be adjusted downward through in-kind product donations. Our contractor can better negotiate these donations, such as the steel roof deck and roof joists that Nucor Corporation has generously pledged. Our pitch to companies is that we serve a large community, have a great publicity machine and our nature center will be a highly-visited community amenity, plus that [there are naming rights](#).
- The Central Florida Foundation and University of Central Florida Center for Public and Nonprofit Management students with their professor and mentor made a site visit in March and seemed interested in helping us fund our exhibits.
- We continue looking for corporate



Central Florida Foundation and UCF Center for Public and Nonprofit Management professor and students visiting the old Truck Shop building we will be turning into a nature and events center. *Photo: Rick Baird*

donors that could benefit from being a part of this project. The adjacent Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive continues to grow in visitation while development adjacent to the site increases, so visibility of a sponsorship increases every day.

Restoration

- Our project—restoring upland habitat at the edge of the 20,000 acre Lake Apopka North Shore, next to increasing housing and industrial development—is an inspiring one and has attracted some amazing retirees with exactly the experience needed to accomplish habitat restoration. Our newest recruit, Lance Hart, retired from the St. Johns River Water Management District in wetland permitting and knows both the ecological and regulatory environment. Along with Steve Turner, who retired from NOAA Fisheries and who had volunteered at Archbold Biological Station, Lance has mapped our cogon grass infestation through a laborious ground truthing process. These and other volunteers also mapped gopher tortoise burrows and staked the



Alan Shapiro and Steve Turner trimming cogon grass around gopher tortoise burrow. *Photo: Lance Hart*



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.

A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES BY CALLING TOLL-FREE, 1-800-435-7352, WITHIN THE STATE. VISIT WWW.FDACS.GOV FOR HELP. REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE. REGISTRATION NO. CH2330

burrows to protect them.

- As part of our long-term effort to control the invasive cogon grass and plant natives, much of the property was mowed in mid March. We thank Ameriscapes Landscape Management, recruited by Alan Shapiro from his nursery industry contacts, for doing this job, following instructions of our volunteers. Mowing encourages the cogon grass to grow, preferably over a foot tall, so it can absorb herbicide during a late spring treatment. Orange Audubon and the City will again be applying for funding assistance through a Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Upland Plant Management grant.
- Thirteen gopher tortoise burrows were found months ago. The new survey found more but only a few were verified as active — during the winter the tortoises become inactive and vegetation around the burrow grows. Gopher tortoises also use multiple burrows. Using an abundance of caution, all possible burrows were staked off.
- Using the maps created by our skilled volunteers, our Apopka Birding Park Working Group will be developing a conceptual site plan, specifying what habitats we want to try to recreate in the different sections of the property.
- Meanwhile, the entry landscape, funded by the Florida Wildflower Foundation and by the Bloom and Grow Garden Club of Winter Garden, is growing in well. Led by Alan Shapiro, we are mulching with oak leaves and pine straw brought by our members and are hand watering using a 200-gallon water tank loaned and kindly filled by the St. Johns River Water Management District. Next step is creating labels for the plants. The many Leopold benches make the entry landscape a comfortable place to watch birds, and Alan has installed bird feeders. Donations of bird seed and additional feeders are welcome.
- Dr. Peter Berry, president of the nonprofit Green Trees Once More, has helped us establish nearly 100 cypress trees at the Apopka Birding Park over the past year. Although it is an upland site, the terrain slopes toward the surrounding canals and there are wet depressions. Cypress trees will add important nesting and roosting habitat for birds as they grow in.
- Apopka Birding Park workdays are the last Saturdays of the month, 9 am to 12 pm. Next is April 25th. If you have never



Blue Grosbeak on Sugarberry. *Photo: Joe Mileyka.*
Eastern Bluebird using bird box at the Apopka Birding Park. *Photo: Jack Horton.* Dr. Peter Berry planting cypress trees. *Photo: Alan Shapiro*

participated, [sign up at this link](#). Companies wanting a volunteer day can arrange to come out on a weekday and do various projects, perhaps making bird boxes. Contact us at info@orangeaudubonfl.org.

Getting the Word Out

Working to acknowledge and steward our donors, we notice that almost all of you who donated in 2025 and so far in 2026 are Orange Audubon members and on our mailing list. That shows tremendous support from our own community — again, thank you all so much — but we need to expand our breadth of support.

[FastSigns Apopka](#) was kind enough to print and install a sign about our project that is now visible from the Wildlife Drive. The Drive

received 264,000 visitors in 2025, and if some of the regulars, big fans of the Drive, would donate, that would really help.

Channel 6 reporter Paul Giorgio [did a nice story on our efforts](#).

The owner of Propagate Social House and Hall's on Fifth, two restaurants in downtown Apopka, will be hosting a fundraising party for us on **May 16th on the Propagate deck**. The owner was at the Apopka City Commission meeting in October 2024 when our architect presented the design plans to the commissioners and has been interested in our project since then. More on the party to come, but please mark your calendars!

Deborah Green

Gratitude

Thank you to our generous donors who contributed from January through March: Lynne Bachrach, Rick Baird, Brownwood Birders, Sandy Bove, Nancy Bower Bowling, Doris Brookens, Linda Carpenter, Jessica Casey, Joyce Cassidy, Tarflower Chapter, Florida Native Plant Society, in memory of Peggy Lantz, Darren Chastain, Linda Cooper, Bruce Doerle, Friends of Lake Apopka/Joseph Dunn, Dianna Flynt, Ryan Garrison, Paul Gray, Deborah Green, Judy Haft, Mark & Roxanne Jager, Carl & Sharon Kieper, Barbara Kotick, Bruce Matasick, Linda & Richard Maxson, Susan & Hugh Morris, Susan Myers, Elizabeth Nelson, Terry Piper in memory of Peggy Lantz, Cheryl & Malcolm Railey, Lisa Roberts in memory of Gene & Betty Roberts, Barbara Roberts, Joyce Romano in honor of Susan Ledlow, Gilberto Sanchez, Foliage Sertoma, Kathy Sessions, Jessica Sibley, Dorothea Skowron in memory of Richard Skowron, Louis Stern, Jeffrey Switzer, Tracie Theune, Neta Villalobos Bell and Kathleen Wynegar plus others whom we couldn't reach to secure permission to list. We thank you all!!

Donations to Orange Audubon Society are tax-deductible, to the extent permitted by law and can include required minimum distributions from IRAs, as well as Donor Advised Funds, since Orange Audubon Society, Inc. is a qualified 501(c)(3).

Donations can be made by credit card [on our website Nature Center tab](#) or by check to Orange Audubon Society, mailed to P.O. Box 274, Apopka, FL 32704. Be a part of this amazing grassroots effort to create this special place.

Mead Botanical Garden Spring Bird Walks April 4, 11, 18 and 25, 2026

For the past 15 years, Orange Audubon has hosted free bird walks at Mead Botanical Garden in Winter Park each Saturday in April. 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.

On Cornell Lab of Ornithology's eBird over [200 species have been documented](#), including 35 species of warblers, most of which should be in their colorful breeding plumage in April. These walks, led by different leaders each week, are free but [registration is required](#). Join us!



Mead Botanical Garden Spring Bird Walk. Participants are looking at a Yellow-billed Cuckoo
Photo: Deborah Green.

Yes, Spring Migration is Back!

Some of our early migrants are already being seen — Swallow-tailed Kites, Great Crested Flycatchers and Northern Parulas — but peak season is throughout April when millions of migrant birds travel from Central/South America and the Caribbean, cross the Gulf of Mexico and primarily travel up Florida's West Coast on their way to northern breeding areas, a flight route called the Atlantic Flyway.

Depending on weather and a bird's preparation for the journey across the Gulf, many will land at the first greenery they see which is typically Florida's West Coast. (Orange Audubon has an annual trip to Fort De Soto Park to look for those migrants — see article page 6).

Birders who make the annual pilgrimage to Ft. De Soto in the Spring often recall experiencing "fallouts" — when weather



Northern Parula, a migrant going north with some staying to breed in our area. Photo: Kathy Rigling

changes cause even larger quantities of birds to quit fighting wind and weather and drop to the first visible ground. While birders hope for smooth passage for migrants, we are still delighted to see Indigo Buntings, Scarlet Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Magnolia Warblers, and many others as they stop for a rest and feeding break on their journey.

Migration has been getting more difficult each year as changing weather patterns make weather and winds more variable. Couple this with the loss of good "recharge" habitat and it can be easy to see why we have lost 2.9 Billion birds since the seventies.

On our part, Orange Audubon is working to build and "rewild" a nature center on upland property near the entrance to the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive, called the Apopka Birding Park. Check out the article on page 2-3 to see what's happening and stop by for a visit. Consider how you can help us.

Another way you can help is by making your yard a refuge for birds. Take advantage of the loss of those non-native plants that froze this year and replace them with native plants that have the insects, berries and flowers to nurture both local and migrating birds. Native plant nurseries near us include Green Isle Gardens in Groveland, Eden of Wings in Sanford, Four Acres Farms in Christmas, Audubon Park Plant Nursery and by appointment, Orlando Native Plants

Northwest FL Panhandle Birding, April 7-12, 2026

Two spaces are left in Orange Audubon Society's five-day trip to see migratory and breeding songbirds and shorebirds in the Florida Panhandle from Tuesday, April 7, through Sunday, April 12. We will stay in Appalachicola and at the Tall Timbers Field Station, visit St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, St. George Island State Park, Bald Point State Park, Alligator Point and other sites in Leon County. Cost is \$300 for members; \$350 for non-members, and includes local expert guides and some picnic meals. Register at this [link](#). For lodging and other details, contact Teresa Williams at (407) 718-1977.



Hooded Warbler seen on the North Florida Panhandle Trip. Photo: Brian Miller.

Urban Nursery. Always check online for times and days these centers are open as independent nurseries are not big box stores. Check for native plant sales by the Tarflower Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society at its Backyard Biodiversity Day at Mead Botanical Garden and Leu Garden's Annual Plant Sale. And remember, Florida Friendly plants are not necessarily Florida native plants.

Between the two hardest days of frost this year, as I sat eating breakfast I looked out my kitchen window and saw a Tropical Sage blooming. It was shortly visited by a Ruby-throated Hummingbird sipping from the flower. Then a Painted Bunting stopped at the same plant to eat the seeds from past blooms. (I don't remove past blooms in the winter because buntings love those seeds).

Interesting fact I learned this year — did you know migrating hummingbirds have a heart rate of 1200 beats per minute and often double their weight prior to migration?

So while we get our binoculars and scopes cleaned and ready for migration action, consider getting your yard ready for migration, too. And I'll see you birding!

Susan Thome-Barrett



City Nature Challenge, April 24 - April 27, 2026

Bioblitzes are biological survey events that attempt to record *all the species within a designated area*. Most bioblitzes are carried out in parks or preserves to document success of land management practices. But how much of the United States is preserved land?

In his book *Bringing Nature Home*, Dr. Doug Tallamy estimates only 5% of the U.S. is in parks and preserves, 41% is in agriculture and 54% is urban/suburban. Converting the 54% to better habitat is the impetus to plant natives in our own landscapes and create the Homegrown National Park ([March 2024 OASis](#), p. 5).

To optimistically document success of the Homegrown National Park effort, scientists need data on animal and plant populations in urban areas. The **City Nature Challenge** is an international effort to find and document plants and wildlife in cities. It's a bioblitz but with a twist. **Cities or counties are in a friendly competition with each other to see which can make the most observations of nature, which can find the most species, and which can engage the most people.**



The Los Angeles' Natural History Museum and San Francisco's California Academy of Sciences dreamed up the City Nature Challenge (CNC) in 2016 as a fun way to hold an event around urban biodiversity using their cities' friendly rivalry. In 2017, the CNC went national, and in 2018, became an international event with thousands of participants and observations.

iNaturalist

Essential to the success of the City Nature Challenge as a community science effort is an easy-to-use mobile app called [iNaturalist](#). This app capitalizes on the amazing technology available on mobile phones, both Apple and Android, with GPS tracking to make locations of observations easy, plus the phone's great cameras and recording ability. Go to Projects at the bottom of your iNaturalist screen and search for City Nature Challenge Orange County Florida and join the project.

With iNaturalist on your phone, you hit the Observe tab, and then Camera, to take a photo and share that directly to the database. Other users assist in identifying organisms from your photographs (or recordings). Here's a graphic on how to use it.



OBSERVE (plant, animal, fungi, etc.)

Take a photo within the iNaturalist app

Upload (if you have registered for the Project, your observation will automatically be added).

Orange County's City Nature Challenge

For the past six years, The Nature Conservancy has led the City Nature Challenge effort in Orange County with partnership of Orange Audubon Society. The Tarflower Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society is another partner that publicizes this fun opportunity to contribute to scientific knowledge. We had 252 participants in 2025 and could use many more to compete with other counties!

First, download the iNaturalist app on your mobile phone from wherever you download apps, and start practicing making observations. To join our 2026 project and be ready for April 24-27, [follow this link](#).

To see how many observations, species and observers we had in 2025 and who did the most observations in 2025, check [this link](#). Help us keep up momentum by posting your progress on Instagram or Facebook and tagging the sponsors.

Free CNC Field Trips

On Saturday, April 25th, join Alex DeBear at the monthly Bird Survey at the Apopka Birding Park and make iNaturalist observations to contribute to our documenting biodiversity on our restoration property (p. 2-3).

Orange Audubon will be offering a special City Nature Challenge Bird Walk and Field trip on Sunday, April 26th from 8:00 to 11:00am. Join Kathy Rigling and Glenn Blaser using iNaturalist to explore the Tosohatchee Wildlife Management Area (WMA), 3365 Taylor Creek Road, Christmas. As with all Florida WMAs, admission is \$3 per vehicle, free for 65+ and under 16 with proof of residency. Registration is now [open on our website](#).

We hope you participate in the CNC, even a little bit! Thanks. *Deborah Green with Christianah Oyenuga, The Nature Conservancy*

Young Birders Trips

The Orange Audubon chapter of the Florida Young Birders had a wonderful time on our joint field trip with West Volusia Audubon to Lyonia Preserve and Environmental Center on March 1st.

Led by Eli Schaperow of West Volusia Audubon and Glenn Blaser and Kathy Rigling of Orange Audubon, the Young Birders were enthralled with several sightings of Florida Scrub Jays along with other scrub inhabitants including Eastern Towhee, White-eyed Vireos, Eastern Bluebirds and Brown Thrashers.



Young Birders and their guardians at Lyonia Preserve, March 1, 2026. Photo: Glenn Blaser

Our next Young Birders trip will be a spring migration bird walk just for Young Birders and their families.

It will be April 11th from 8:00-11:00 am at Mead Botanical Garden in Winter Park.

April is the best time to see migrating birds, such as warblers and thrushes. We will have fun looking for these special little visitors!

Leaders will be Kathy Rigling, Jimena Aguirre and advanced young birder Haden Klinger. Here is the registration link <https://orangeaudubonfl.org/field-trip-signup/>

On May 2nd from 6:30 to 8 pm, we will be doing an owl prowl at the Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland. Leaders are Kathy Rigling, Jimena Aguirre and Daisy Fiore of Audubon Florida.

This is a special event just for the Florida Young Birders and will include an interactive owl talk, meeting 2 or 3 owl ambassadors and walking around the owl exhibits after dark and listening for hoots! Registration is now open on our website. Also if your child is not yet a member of the Florida Young Birders Club, please consider joining. You will have access to special young birder events and a yearly overnight trip as well as a 50 percent discount on binoculars and other optics.

Here is that website: <https://floridayoungbirders.org>

Kathy Rigling

Fort DeSoto, April 20-21, 2026

We have a few spots left for our Fort DeSoto overnight trip April 20th-21st.

Fort DeSoto is legendary! It is what we call a “migrant trap.” During spring migration, many songbirds make the arduous and dangerous Gulf crossing from Central America and Mexico to Florida.

With favorable weather conditions and birders’ luck, the numbers and variety of migrants at Fort De Soto on any given day in April can be nothing less than awesome.

The cost (\$95 for members and \$125 for nonmembers) includes two full days of guided birding and one lunch. Participants will make their own arrangements for accommodations. Limit 12 participants.

With Lori Mathis, Jerry Mathis and Lorri Lilja as our guides we will spend two full days birding Fort DeSoto Park and any other areas nearby where migrant birds are being seen.

Register on our website: <https://orangeaudubonfl.org/field-trip-signup/> If you have any questions, contact Kathy Rigling at riglingkathy@gmail.com.



Snowy Plover at Fort DeSoto Park. Photo Josph Mileyka



March 2026 Buscando Pajaros trip. Participants used loaner binoculars and our Spanish bird identification sheets. Photos courtesy trip leader Gilberto Perez-Sanchez:



March 2026 Shingle Creek Field Trip led by Noah and Gary Steinberg. Photo Glenn Blaser

Please Conserve Water in Our Dry Season

Florida’s dry season is October to late April, and this year we are experiencing drought conditions, with Central Florida classified as in moderate drought.

The maxim “April showers bring May flowers” doesn’t apply in Florida. April is typically Florida’s driest month, and as temperatures increase, rainfall lags behind plants’ water needs so people tend to crank up their irrigation. Here are ways to help:

- Water only when necessary (when plants are wilted).
- Make sure you have a functioning hose nozzle for hand watering.
- If you have an automatic irrigation system, know your St. Johns River Water Management District watering restriction irrigation days. Here is the link: <https://www.sjrwmd.com/wateringrestrictions/> The Irrigation Hotline Number is 386-329-4545.
- 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.

Orange Audubon Conservation Committee

Education Program Update

March has been a bustling month for educational programming. I did programs at 12 Orange County Public Schools, led a Young Birders Club field trip at Lyonia Preserve, helped to lead a bird walk at Orlando Wetlands for the Audubon Florida Conservation Leadership Program and tabled at four different school family science/ STEM nights.



Altogether we reached 1,087 students and 271 adults. Highlights include bird counts with 3rd graders at Ocoee Elementary where we observed nesting Osprey, flights of Double-crested Cormorants, Yellow-rumped and Palm Warblers and hunting Eastern Bluebirds.

We also led a nature walk for the Dommerich Elementary Eco Garden Club at Mead Botanical Garden. Over 100 students and parents attended this walk in which we explored a few of the habitats at the Gardens.

Our interactive display was well received at Camelot Elementary, Kelly Park School, Wedgefield K-8 and Baldwin Park Elementary. The students really enjoyed interacting with our student volunteers as they played the bird beak game.

A big thank you to our volunteers this month: Jimena Aguirre, Jaliza Almeida, Jennifer Barber, Maddie Barber, Glenn Blaser, Terrie Leibler, Randy McCall, Alan Shapiro, Jessica Sodano and Susan Thome-Barrett.

Volunteering and Out Reach Events – WE NEED YOU!

Now more than ever we could use some of our members to help us with upcoming and on-going activities. If you haven't volunteered with Orange Audubon before maybe now is the time to get out there. The opportunities are low stress and our current volunteers are fulfilled by their service

Upcoming Outreach Events

- April 11-12 – Spring Fever in the Garden, Winter Garden - various shifts during the day on Saturday and Sunday
- April 25 – Lake Eola Earth Day – various shifts between 10 am and 6 pm
- April 25 – 26 Apopka Art and Foliage Festival – various shifts during the day on Saturday and Sunday

Other Volunteer Opportunities

- We are really wanting to expand our group of Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive ambassadors. This is a 2 ½ hour shift at the beautiful Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive entrance on Saturday or Sunday. Volunteers are assigned in pairs.
- Helping our Education Coordinator with school events
- Assisting with clean-up, planting, etc for our future Orange Audubon Nature Center at the Apopka Birding Park
- Hospitality at our monthly in-person programs at Leu Gardens, 3rd Thursdays, 6 pm

IF YOU CAN HELP WITH ANY OF THESE OUTREACH AND VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES, PLEASE EMAIL: volunteer@orangeaudubonfl.org

*Mary Van Egmond, Volunteer Coordinator
Volunteer Coordinator*

Our monthly free educational webinars continue on Tuesday April 14th from 7:00-7:30 pm with a program about participating in the City Nature Challenge with students. The link to sign up is <http://eepurl.com/imGskM>

Orange Audubon still has availability to conduct on-campus bird counts and other standards-based educational programs. Interested educators should email me at education@orangeaudubonfl.org.

Kathy Rigling, Education Coordinator

Get More Involved With Orange Audubon

Orange Audubon Society's annual election of board members will be held before the Monday, April 13, 2026 program at Leu Gardens. I chair the nominating committee with committee members Mary Soule (msoule43@aol.com) and Bob Sena (robs32812@yahoo.com).

To serve on the board, you must be an Orange Audubon member, have an interest in wildlife and the environment that supports it, and be able to attend monthly one-hour board meetings either at Leu Gardens or on Zoom on the third Thursday of each month (except July and August). Board members are expected to attend an all-day summer planning meeting, usually in late July.

Prior to or concurrent with applying for the board, please join one of Orange Audubon' committees or volunteer efforts. Most help is needed with conservation, education, and outreach. The Orange Audubon board application collects information about your interests and skills to align them with Orange Audubon' needs. If you wish to give back to your community through the conservation and nature education initiatives of Orange Audubon, please contact me at rbaird4@att.net. Thank you! *Rick Baird*



Rick Baird with Jan Rahill at the Apopka Birding Park workday, February 28th Photo: Jim Cunningham

Update Your Membership

April is a great time to join or renew your 3-way membership in Orange Audubon, Audubon Florida and National Audubon Society. Please pay directly to Orange Audubon, and we transmit the fee to National. If you want to include an additional donation to Orange Audubon, you can.

The base rate is \$20 (\$15 for students). Go to Orange Audubon's website and click the [Join/Renew link](#). If you need your expiration date or have any questions, email membership@orangeaudubonfl.org. Thank you for supporting our chapter by being a member.

APRIL/MAY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Chats with Orange Audubon via Zoom

[Link to register](#)

- **Birding Colombia by Luis Gles & Mariah Hryniewich**
April 2, 2026- -
- **Flock to Marion Cruise by Joe Hammond**
April 9, 2026-
- **Panama Birding by Alex DeBear**
April 23, 2026
- **Lyonia Preserve Florida Scrub Jays by Christie Miller**
May 7, 2026
- **Birds of Oklahoma by Matthew Radford**
May 14, 2026
- **Great Birding by Hannah & Erik**
May 28, 2026

Oakland Nature Preserve Bird Survey

March 29, 2026

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Spring Migration Bird Walks at Mead Botanical Garden

April 4, 11, 18 and 25, 2026

Register: <https://orangeaudubonfl.org/activities/field-trips/>

Young Birders Migration Bird Walk, Mead Botanical Garden

April 11, 2026

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Wekiwa Springs State Park Bird Survey, Apopka

April 12, 2026

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

April Program: Rehabilitating Native Animals by Debbie Helsen

April 13, 2026 (note Monday date)

Contact Deborah at info@orangeaudubonfl.org

Chertok Photo Contest Deadline

Deadline to submit all entries: Apr 16, 2026

Deadline to replace disqualified entries: May 21, 2026

Awards: Jun 18, 2026 — (407) 718-1977

Register: <https://orangeaudubonfl.org/photo-contest/>

Contact Teresa at (407) 718-1977

Fort De Soto Park, Pinellas County

April 20-21, 2026

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

City Nature Challenge (Bioblitz with iNaturalist)

April 24 - 27, 2026

Contact Deborah at info@orangeaudubonfl.org

Apopka Birding Park Bird Survey and City Nature Challenge

April 25, 2026

Contact Alexander at alexdebear@icloud.com

Apopka Birding Park Workday

April 25, 2026

Contact Deborah at info@orangeaudubonfl.org

Tosohatchee WMA City Nature Challenge Trip

April 26, 2026

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com



Grubhub—Sandhill Cranes. 2025 Chertok Florida Native Nature Photo Contest, Honorable Mention Winner, Novice Category. Photo: Tracy Dreyfus

North Shore Bird Survey

April 28, 2026

Contact Deborah at info@orangeaudubonfl.org

Rock Springs Run Reserve Bird Survey, Sorrento

April 30, 2026

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Young Birders Owl Prowl, Center for Birds of Prey

May 2, 2026

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Baby Owl Shower at Center for Birds of Prey, Maitland

May 9, 2026

Contact Teresa at (407) 718-1977

Wekiwa Springs State Park Bird Survey, Apopka

May 9, 2026

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Katie's Landing Kayaking, Lake County

May 16, 2026

Contact Alan at alangrandiflora@gmail.com

Orange Audubon Fundraising Party, Propagate Social House, Apopka

May 16, 2026

Contact Deborah at info@orangeaudubonfl.org

May Program: Habitats of Central Florida and the Mead Sandhill Restoration Project by Catherine Bowman

May 21, 2026

Contact Alan at alangrandiflora@gmail.com