



Catherine Bowman leading a 2013 plant tour for Valencia College faculty and staff on Valencia's West Campus. Photo courtesy Valencia College. Right, Partridge Pea, a native plant that harbors many pollinators, and Black-throated Blue Warbler feeding on American Beautyberry. Photos: Mary Keim

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

May 21, 2026

You asked that we include a presentation on our local habitats, and we have the perfect speaker! Catherine Bowman will present for us on May 21st on the historic and diverse native plants at Mead Botanical Garden.

Catherine spent her early years roaming the longleaf pine communities, coastal habitats, swamps, blackwater streams, and pitcher plant bogs of Northwest Florida. Her thirty-year professional career as an ecological consultant started with a B.S. in Botany from the University of Central Florida and a focus on field botany and plant ecology.

Catherine is president and co-owner of Bowman and Blair Ecology and Design, Inc. in Oviedo. Bowman and Blair works with property owners, builders, engineers, and architects to identify wetlands and listed species.

She is also a long-time participant in the Tarflower Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS). She served as the Tarflower Chapter President for 7 years and on the State FNPS board for 4 years. Her interests over the past 12 years have focused on restoration of upland habitat at Mead Botanical Garden. She has worked with volunteers to create collections of plants which would have grown beneath the existing longleaf pines and sand live oaks. She serves as Mead Garden Committee Chair and is on the Board of Trustees for Mead Botanical Garden.

Join us at Leu Gardens Thursday, May 21st at 7 p.m. for a fascinating program. Free and no reservations required. Address 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/

Orange Audubon Fundraiser

May 16, 2026

Join Orange Audubon on Saturday, May 16th from 6–10 PM for a lively night at Propagate Social House on the Shade House deck in downtown Apopka.

For just \$30, enjoy a free drink and raffle ticket

—plus a fun-filled atmosphere with:

Music & dancing

Great raffles

Mingling with fellow supporters & special guests

Grab dinner from nearby food trucks or head across the street to Hall's on Fifth for a bite!

All proceeds support Orange Audubon's mission to begin construction on the Orange Audubon Nature / Special Events Center at Apopka Birding Park.

Location: Propagate Social House

40 East 5th Street, Apopka, FL

Date: Saturday, May 16, 2026

Time: 6–10 PM

Registration link: <https://orangeaudubonfl.org/orange-audubon-fundraiser/>

Questions? Reach out at info@orangeaudubonfl.org

Come for the fun, stay for the cause!





**We Raised
Over \$120,000**

See how you can help!



Getting Closer

Thank you so very much to the 150 donors who have contributed so far in 2026 towards Orange Audubon's

nature center on the 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 create a learning place about nature, wellness and sustainability.

Update on the \$600K in 60 day campaign

An amazing \$120,000 was donated so far in 2026, which should bring in our pledged \$108,000 match. This is a long way from \$600K in 60 days but is still some of the best fundraising that Orange Audubon has done to date.

How close are we to being able to start construction? While trying to reel in the last \$400K, we are taking some baby steps.

The building

We have selected our building contractor! We will be using R.B.Marks Construction of Winter Springs, that just celebrated 20 years. Our architect Philip Donovan of Little Diversified Architectural Consulting had worked with R.B. Marks on a complicated project, the renovation of the Plaza Live Theatre in the Milk District and looks forward to working with them on this project.

Construction costs have risen since we first secured our architect's design and price estimate two years ago. R.B. Marks was instructed, after meeting with us, to go through the estimate and try to find ways for us to save, while still installing state of the art equipment so we can achieve LEED Gold status. Having our contractor on-board will help us negotiate in-kind 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](#).

We continue looking for corporate donors



Orange Audubon's newly selected building contractor R.B. Marks visited in March with subs to see the project and help develop its quote. *Photo: Deborah Green*

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 significant donation 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—has attracted some 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 burrows to protect them. FWC requires staking around the burrow with a 25 foot radius. We thank Ameriscapes Landscape Management, recruited by Alan Shapiro from his nursery industry contacts, for mowing the property in March, 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.



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



Orange Audubon Society 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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www.orangeaudubonfl.org

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The *OASis* (Orange Audubon Society information source) newsletter is published monthly, September–June, and posted on the Orange Audubon 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 Orange Audubon's' [MEETUP](#) GROUP
LIKE OAS' [FACEBOOK](#) PAGE

OAS welcomes those who wish to volunteer and become more involved in our efforts. Email volunteer@orangeaudubonfl.org.

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Continued from p. 2. Orange Audubon and our landlord, the City of Apopka, have applied for funding assistance through a Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Upland Plant Management grant.

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.

The long-awaited removal of the concrete pads (bases of old greenhouses), by a contractor with the St. Johns River Water Management District, has begun. It will extend through July on Mondays through Thursdays, and the Apopka Birding Park must be closed during those days. It will be open again on the weekends.

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 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 put up 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 over the past year.

Apopka Birding Park workdays are the last Saturdays of the month, 9 am to 12 pm. Next is May 30th. If you have never 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.

As you know, we are an all-volunteer chapter, with the exception of Kathy Rigling's Education Coordinator position which is part-time. We will need a paid Center Director and need that position's funding to be sustainable. We have recently joined the Association of Nature Center Administrators (ANCA) and will be seeking mentorship from other nature centers

around the country as we proceed. We will be creating a plan outlining possible income

we can expect in the future versus operating expenses. If any of our members would like to help, please email info@orangeaudubonfl.org.



Concrete pads being removed, late April 2026, Photo: Deborah Green. Lance Hart marking which pads to save, Photo: Jack Horton.

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.

The Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive received 264,000 visitors in 2025, and if some of the regulars, big fans of the Drive, would donate, that would really help. We need more coverage like the Channel 6 [story on our efforts](#).



The owner of Propagate Social House and Hall's on Fifth, 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.

[Sign up for this fun event at this link.](#)

We are still collecting items for the raffle that is part of the fundraising of this event. Contact me if you have anything that might fit at info@orangeaudubonfl.org.

Hope to see you!

Deborah Green

Gratitude

Thank you to our generous donors who contributed from January through April: James Adamski, Jan Addison, Lynne Bachrach, Carol Bailey-White, Richard Baird, Liz Bartell, Sandra Bauerschmidt, Glenn Blaser, Sandy Bove, Nancy Bower Bowling, Doris Brookens, Linda Carpenter, Jessica Casey, Joyce Cassidy, Christopher D Chastain, Rachel Comstock in memory of Dr. Susan Crafts, Linda Cooper, Lorraine Cowl, Bruce Doerle, Joseph Dunn for Friends of Lake Apopka, Paula Durlach, Yanga Fernandez, Dianna Flynt, Joy Fox, Ryan Garrison, Linda Gaunt, Pam Schrimsher & Grant Basham, Paul Gray, Deborah Green, Judy Haft, Jim and Mary Helmers, Mark & Roxanne Jager, J Daniel Jones, George Kacperski, Cynthia Kay, Carl and Sharon Kieper, Barbara Kotick, Elda Larche, Nancy Leclair, Jurgen Lorenzen, Bruce Matasick, Linda & Richard Maxson, Andrew Mears, Brent Mobley, Eric Moore, Susan and Hugh Morris, Susan Myers, Elizabeth Nelson, Vickie Parrish, Karen Picciano, Teresa Piper in memory of Peggy Lantz, Eugene and Jeanne Polarolo, Cheryl and Malcolm Railey, Richard Reed, Barbara Roberts, Lisa Roberts in memory of Gene and Betty Roberts, Joyce Romano in honor of Susan Ledlow, Gilberto Sanchez, Robert & Flo Sena, Kathy Sessions, Alan Shapiro, Jessica Sibley Dorothea Skowron in memory of Richard Skowron, Richard Sloane, Joyce & Bill Stefancic, Louis Stern, Jeffrey Switzer, Jennifer Taylor in memory of Mom, Dad and Granny, Tracie Theune, Susan Thome-Barrett, Mary Van Egmond, Neta Villalobos-Bell, Eloise West, Charlotte White, Kathleen Wynegar, Robert Zinkil, Randy and Michelle Zwirn, Brownwood Birders, Foliage Garden Club of Apopka, Tarflower Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society and Foliage Sertoma Club of Apopka, 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.



Andrew Letter, Awards Committee Chair, presenting the Florida Chapter of The Wildlife Society's The Influential Woman in Wildlife Award to Deborah Green. Photo: Jay Exum.

Recognitions

Orange Audubon president Deborah Green, Ph.D., was awarded the Florida Chapter of The Wildlife Society's The Influential Woman in Wildlife Award for 2026. This award acknowledges a woman who has made outstanding contributions in the field of wildlife management or conservation and recognizes the leadership and inspiration she provides for those who strive to positively impact Florida species and habitats.

Her nomination by Jay Exum was selected by the society's awards committee and presented at the 2026 Spring meeting April 16th in Cocoa Beach. Since Deborah's background is entomology and she advocates for plants for birds, she took the opportunity to talk about two influential books, Doug Tallamy's *Bringing Nature Home* and Scott Weidensaul's *Living on the Wind*. [See her short speech about the caterpillar connection at this link.](#)



New Podcast Episode
S6 E14: Connecting People with Nature. A conversation with Kathy...
Bird's Eye View

Orange Audubon's Education Coordinator Kathy Rigling was the interviewee on the birder's podcast "Bird's Eye View" by Mathew G. Radford. The interview shows Kathy the birder and shows why she developed her award-winning Schoolyard Bird Surveys. Kathy is a retired middle school educator who can teach to all ages, from very young to adults. And she is an avid birder with a passion to learn more and is a "listener," as demonstrated in [this podcast](#).

Volunteering Thanks

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. The opportunities are low stress and our current volunteers find their service fulfilling.

In April, there were many outreach events and we thank all the volunteers: Earth Day Valencia, Rick Baird and Anne Marie Merrill; Spring Fever in the Garden, Winter Garden, Rick Baird, Deborah Green, Maevyn Laurette, Mercy Peou, Lori Riddle, Jessie Sodano, and Mary and Steve Van Egmond; Earth Day Lake Eola, Rick Baird and Jessie Sodano; Apopka Art and Foliage Festival, Jennifer Barber, Bob Elmquist, Deborah Green, Mercy Peou, Lori Riddle and Alan Shapiro.

May Volunteer Needs

On Sunday, May 3rd, the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive 11th anniversary celebration will be held 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

On Friday, May 8th, Market on Fifth in downtown Apopka, will be a fun evening 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

On Saturday, May 9th, the Baby Owl Shower will be held at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey, Maitland. Help Teresa Williams sell T-shirts at this fun event.

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

Mary Van Egmond, Volunteer Coordinator



Rick Baird at the Market on Fifth in Apopka
Photo: Deborah Green.



White-faced Ibis, a rarity being seen on the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive. Photo: Rafael Gomez

Limited Edition Kayak/Canoe/Paddleboard Birding Trip, Katie's Landing, May 16, 2026

We will meet at 8:00 a.m. at Katie's Landing at 262 Wekiva Park Drive, Sanford. Everyone must bring their own non-motorized watercraft! Standup paddle-boards can also be used. NOTE: No loaners or rentals are available!

At 8:15 a.m., we will launch our canoes and kayaks and float downstream slowly looking for birds and enjoying the peaceful surroundings.

After a few hours, we will turn around and paddle back against the current to the launch point. Save your energy for the return trip! Leaders are Alan Shapiro and Matt Richardson
Cost: \$15 members \$20 nonmembers. Here is the sign-up link. <https://orangeaudubonfl.org/>

Florida Young Birders Club Merritt Island Hotspots Field Trip, May 17th, 2026

The Florida Young Birders Club in collaboration with Orange Audubon will be holding a trip to Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge on May 17th.

This will be a more advanced birding session, so we will be limiting this trip to 12-17 year old Young Birders and their families.

Depending on the conditions, we will be searching for migrating shorebirds and passerines. If there are favorable winds, we may also attempt some sea watching (only if we had strong NE winds). The trip is free. Leaders are Brennan Landreville, Glenn Blaser, Ethan Landreville and Haden Klinger. Here is the sign-up link. <https://orangeaudubonfl.org/field-trip-signup/field-trip-signup/>

North Shore Birding Survey

On these monthly surveys, following the same protocols as years ago, we have been crushing it of late, which is awesome. In March, we saw 106 species. There were 16 of us, and all survey legs were covered.

April is our one-year anniversary of these surveys! Eighteen of us covered 11 Legs. 111 species were tallied.

Bobolinks were the theme for the day, as they make their way up north to grassy pastures. When I lived in New Hampshire, we had a large grass field that surrounded our house. I used to go out in the field and lay down (there were no fire ants there) and watch the Bobolinks display above me. Song and flight display are almost comical in a way. Most of the morning I thought I heard Bobolinks going overhead, but 279 were recorded by our combined surveys.



Male Bobolink, photographed in Michigan. Photo: Alex DeBear

The female Canvasback is still around, hopefully she'll get new primaries or its going to be a long summer for her of avoiding gators. From thousands of Ring-necked Ducks, we are down to 4. We saw nine Blue-winged Teal - watch those. They have bred on property before.

We don't do the Sand Farms too much anymore; this is the best area for Bobwhites. From the edges we can hear the males calling. However, this time we had them in the Green Mountain area and along Leg 9, for a total of 4.

Moving forward, everyone should check the tall Willow stands, for breeding Yellow-billed Cuckoos. We had one on the survey. There were 26 Common Ground Doves and only 4 White-winged Doves. Check the song, several were calling along the willow stands as I was driving to my Leg.

Soras are still around with 17 observed (do they breed in FL? I didn't think they did).

Only 37 coots, hahaha.... but 67 Purple

Gallinules, WOW... Seven species of shorebird, with 10 "not so Solitary" Sandpipers and 5 Spotted Sandpipers was nice.

Black Skimmers have shown up at North Shore, good size flock, we had 17. I believe more have been seen.

Ibis stole the show with 398 White, 95 Glossy, and one White-faced that has been around a couple of weeks now (photo p.4).

Least Bittern must be getting charged up; they seem to be out in the open more as they get ready for breeding. 19 seen or heard this day and 2 American Bittern hanging on. Wading birds were down, but I think that's because they are all out breeding right now. Great Egret, Green Heron, and Great Blues all breed on the North Shore, and yes, they all had the highest numbers; Great - 165, Great Blue Heron - 85, Green - 91.

Mississippi Kites have started to show up; we had one. I would expect more from the next survey. Red-shouldered Hawk kids should be fledging and maybe why we had a high number of 30. Fifty-nine Red-bellied Woodpeckers was a high number and good see 12 Northern Flickers (I wonder if the same birds were heard from Leg to Leg?). Five Eastern Kingbirds and a pair are attempting to nest! Tufted Titmice have fledged again, probably how we got to 21. If you get a chance check out a fledged Tufted, they are so cute with their little tuft.

Swallow update: Tree Swallows are leaving with only 10 reported, 3 Banks and 163 Barns, with both bridges on the drive, having successful Barn colonies.

Catbirds at 55, they should be leaving shortly. Great to hear Swamp Sparrows singing. 47 Swamps recorded. Sparrows are famed for the last to go, so this many Swamps is not all that odd. Savannah numbers have gone down, and 1 White-crowned Sparrow observed. Orchard Orioles have returned to Conrad. We saw 8 species of warblers (Cape May, N. Waterthrush (several singing), Black-and-white, 82 Common Yellowthroats, Redstart, 54 Parulas, Palm, Prairie) which was a nice haul. And 141 Cardinals observed this day.

The next Survey will be May 19th at 6:30 a.m. meeting at McDonald Canal. This is a week earlier than normal.

Thanks everyone and Good Birding,

Chris Newton, North Shore Bird Survey Co-coordinator

June Challenge

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 Saturday June 6 at the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive from 7:00am 12:00 pm. We are excited to feature new young leader Haden Klinger assisting with this trip. Registration is now open on our website and spots are limited.

You don't need to be participating in the June Challenge to sign up for this trip.

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

Apopka Birding Park Survey

Surveys at Orange Audubon's Apopka Birding Park are held on the last Saturday of the month. On the April survey, we had brief looks at a Yellow-billed Cuckoo snacking on caterpillars. We also saw a Prairie Warbler, an American Redstart, Northern Parulas, and at least two Bobolinks.

We've seen a greater abundance of birds during this time of year in the past, but the lack of significant rain throughout the region has not created opportunity for significant yield of migrants. Regardless, we've been keeping an eye out on the west winds for anything that may be blown our way.

As the season progresses, there is a much greater chance for an increase in rainfall, which may let us get eyes on some later migrants. Thank you to all of those that have volunteered their time to help catalog biodiversity with us! The next survey will be on May 30th at 7:00am, with an optional opportunity to arrive earlier around 6:00 to beat the heat and witness the early morning flight. Email me to register at alexdebear@icloud.com. Hope to see you!

Alexander DeBear



Migratory Bird Day

The height of spring bird migration for us is April, as Florida is the first place the birds pass through on their way north.

But throughout most of the country, May is when the birds return, so World Migratory Bird Day is celebrated as May 9th. Celebrations highlight how data collected by the public helps protect migratory bird species.

**Global Big Day Bird Walk
May 9, 2026**

Orange Audubon is so fortunate to have so many trip leaders! In a complete pop-up trip, we now have a Global Big Day Bird Walk on May 9, 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. Join us as we walk through beautiful Mead Gardens counting as many species as we can find. Trip is free, and all levels of birders are welcome. Leaders are Colin Giebner and Matt Richardson. Register [at this link](#)

2026 Mead Walks Report

For the past 15 years, Orange Audubon has hosted free bird walks at Mead Botanical Garden in Winter Park each Saturday in April. Mead is a great migrant trap, supplying insects and berries plus shelter in a variety of habitats — including open water and wetlands as well as uplands with oaks and tall pines.

Over 150 people participated in our walks this year. Many were new to using binoculars and took advantage of our loaners. I was pleased to teach 37 people how to use binoculars and provide tips on how not to lose the bird once spotted

Several people had never been to Mead Botanical Garden before. They learned about the walks from friends, neighbors, the talks Kathy Rigling gave at REI or from Facebook. Leading the trips were Glenn Blaser, Colin Giebner, Linda Gaunt, Chuck

Spring along the Gulf, Fall along the East Coast

Experienced Florida birders will tell you that most birds in migration are seen along the Gulf Coast in spring and along the East Coast in fall.

The poster child for this is the Blackpoll Warbler, a famous long-distance migrant. In fall, Blackpoll Warblers fly nonstop from their breeding grounds in the far northern boreal forests along the Eastern Seaboard out over the Atlantic Ocean to their wintering grounds in northern South America and the Caribbean.



Blackpoll Warbler at Fort DeSoto Park. Photo Glenn Turner

In the spring, Blackpolls don't make this arduous Atlantic flight but instead stop over in the Caribbean Islands and continue north over land.

Fort De Soto Park, in Pinellas County, sticks out into the Gulf and in April is a great place to find migrating warblers that have been blown east during their northward flight across the Gulf. Once in awhile when the conditions are wrong for the birds — winds blowing from the North against them — small birds collapse when they first reach land and are really easy to see. This is called a "fallout."

It is interesting to check eBird for the top birding hotspot in Florida in terms of number of species. At one time our Lake Apopka North Shore was the top of the leaderboard but then a hurricane brought more species in to Gulf Coast sites. Here are [the current eBird Hotspot Species Leaders](#)

Honaker, Susan Morris, Kathy Rigling, Alan Shapiro and Susan Thome- Barrett. We saw fledglings in nests or close to nests: Barred Owls, Red-shouldered Hawks, Pileated and Red-bellied Woodpeckers.

Fort DeSoto Report

The annual Orange Audubon trip to Fort De Soto Park near St. Petersburg was a success with 74 species on Day 1 and 55 species on Day 2. Led by Lorri Lilja and Lori Mathis, our group was able to visit most of the diverse habitats available at this birding hotspot and saw many shorebirds as well as migrating warblers.

There were strong winds the two days of the trip, but we were able to still find birds in the many hotspots that Fort De Soto offers.

Highlights included Blackpoll Warbler, Yellow-throated Vireo, American Oystercatcher on nest, and a white morph Reddish Egret.

Mary Van Egmond



Fort DeSoto trip leaders Lorri Lilja and Lori Mathis. Photo: Mary Van Egmond; White morph Reddish Egret, Photo: Glenn Turner

1. Everglades National Park with 363 species
2. Fort De Soto Park with 357 species
3. St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) with 353
4. Merritt Island NWR with 349 species
5. Lake Apopka North Shore--Orange County section with 345 species

Mead Walks are a wonderful education and experience for everyone. If you missed our spring series, we will do it again every Saturday in October!

Linda Gaunt

Education Program Update

With April being the month of Earth Day, our educational programs have been fully booked. This month we had 26 school visits. Some schools were visited multiple times in order to accommodate their schedule.

Fifty-eight classes received programs, including campus bird counts, bird beak adaptations, habitat components, bird migration, food webs, Florida birds and characteristics of birds.

We did outreach at five evening events, including those themed for Earth Day, science nights and stem nights. Some new schools were added to our lineup. They were Englewood Elementary, Whisper Lakes Elementary, University High School and Lake Nona High School.

With the tremendous help of Orange Audubon board member Alan Shapiro and grant funding from the IDEAL program, we were able to install three native plant gardens. They were planted at Millennia Elementary, Edgewater High School and University High School.



We also had a Young Birders Club spring migration bird walk at Mead Gardens on April 11th. Altogether 1313 students and 217 adults participated in these programs.

A big thank you to Randy McCall, Madeline Barber, Haden Klinger, Jimena Aguirre, Susan Thome - Barrett and Alan Shapiro for assistance.



New garden project at Millennia Elementary. Photos: Kathy Rigling

Some highlights this past month were seeing the excitement of the 34 elementary students at Millennia Elementary when Alan arrived with a truckload of native Florida plants from Green Isle Gardens. Armed with trowels, they were eager to learn how to plant these bird and pollinator friendly plants. With the help of Alan, teachers and a few high school volunteers, the children amazingly planted all 30+ plants in fairly compacted soil in an hour.

Another highlight was when I returned to Sand Lake Elementary for their second bird count (we had counted previously in November), one girl exclaimed that she had been waiting since November to count birds again. She and her classmates searched diligently in the trees and sky and were rewarded with great looks at a very hidden Brown Thrasher, bright male Northern Cardinals, a pair of active Northern Mockingbirds and a Swallowtail Kite, among other species.

Programs will continue to be scheduled on a limited basis over the summer. I can also schedule for the next school year. Interested teachers and other educators should email me at education@orangeaudubonfl.org

Kathy Rigling, Education Coordinator

Orange Audubon Elections

Orange Audubon Society's annual election was held after the April 13, 2026 program at Leu Gardens. I chair the nominating committee with committee members Mary Soule and Bob Sena.

All of our officers agreed to run for another 2-year term. Three new board members were voted in, to join us July 1st. Welcome Jimena Aguirre, Lance Hart and Jessie Sodano. Here is your hardworking, all-volunteer board:

Officers 2026 – 2028

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

Board Members – Non-Officer

Jimena Aguirre (starting July 1st)
Rick Baird
David Bottomley
Linda Carpenter
Alex De Bear
Lance Hart (starting July 1st)
Marian Lichtler
Brent Mobley
Eric Moore
Jessie Sodano (starting July 1st)
Susan Thome-Barrett
Steve Turner
Mary Van Egmond
Teresa Williams

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, Nominating Chair

Update Your Membership

May 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,

MAY/JUNE CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Chats with Orange Audubon via Zoom

[Link to register](#)

- **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

Young Birders Owl Prowl, Center for Birds of Prey

May 2, 2026 (Full)

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive 11th Anniversary

May 3, 2026

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Intro to Birding at REI, Winter Park

May 3, 2026

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Rock Springs Run Reserve Bird Survey, Sorrento

May 6, 2026

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Market on Fifth, Apopka

May 8, 2026

Contact Teresa at (407) 718-1977

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

Global Big Day Walk at Mead Botanical Garden

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 Fundraiser, Propagate Social House, Apopka

May 16, 2026

Contact Deborah at info@orangeaudubonfl.org

Young Birders Field Trip to Merritt Island

May 17, 2026

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

North Shore Bird Survey

May 19, 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



Don't Worry, Beach Happy—Reddish Egret. 2023 Chertok Florida Native Nature Photo Contest, Honorable Mention Winner, Advanced Category. Photo: Amber Favorite

Apopka Birding Park Bird Survey

May 30, 2026

Contact Alexander at alexdebear@icloud.com

Apopka Birding Park Workday

May 30, 2026

Contact Deborah at info@orangeaudubonfl.org

June Challenge Starts

June 1, 2026

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

June Challenge Field Trip at LAWD

June 6, 2026

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Wekiwa Springs State Park Bird Survey, Apopka

June 7, 2026

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Oakland Nature Preserve Bird Survey

June 13, 2026

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Chertok Photo Awards Program

June 18, 2026

Contact Teresa at (407) 718-1977

Intro to Birding at REI in Winter Park

June 20, 2026

Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Online Auction in June

Orange Audubon's Online Auction, associated with our photo contest, will open June 12th at noon and close June 22nd at 7 PM. We will have some of the items on display at the May 21st program, and all will be viewable online about a week before the auction opens.

For more information on the auction, email info@orangeaudubonfl.org or call Auction Chair Linda Gaunt at (941) 704-1189. All proceeds will benefit Orange Audubon Society's Nature and Special Events Center Fund.