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ORANGE AUDUBON SOCIETY

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ORANGE AUDUBON
A Chapter of National and Florida Audubon Societies

www.orangeaudubonfl.org



How do you tell these sparrows apart and which are rarest to see in our area? Attend Alex DeBear's program to find out. Clockwise, *Lurky LeConte's – LeConte's Sparrow.* Honorable Mention, Youth Category. 2025 Chertok Nature Photo Contest. *Photo: Ethan Landreville*; Saltmarsh Sparrow, *Photo: Kathy Rigling;* Swamp Sparrow, *Photo: Brian Miller;* Field Trip to the Apopka Birding Park, Alex is fourth from left. *Photo: Mark Hainen;* Henslow's Sparrow, *Photo: Alex DeBear;* Clay-colored Sparrow, *Photo: Delsy Rodriguez* and center Lincoln's Sparrow, *Photo: Michelle Dill Wilson.*

Sparrows of Florida by Alex DeBear, November 19, 2026

Our warblers, vireos, thrushes and buntings have mostly passed through, and now is the time for the overwintering Florida sparrows. These small, strikingly patterned brown birds ('little brown jobs' or LBJ's for short) spend the majority of their winter throughout Florida's grasslands to recover from a lengthy summer of singing, rearing chicks, and the subsequent migration, according to our November 19th presenter Alex DeBear. In the next few weeks we will see White-crowned, Clay-colored, Swamp, and Savannah Sparrows, quickly followed by Lincoln's, White-throated, Vesper, Song, and Grasshopper Sparrows. All can be found in broomsedge fields and the well-spaced shrubs in these fields. Alex is a big fan of these elusive songbirds. Prepare your questions, and we'll see you in person on Thursday, November 19th in the Camellia Room at Leu Gardens to enjoy this free talk! Come at 6:30 p.m., for socializing. Program starts at 7 p.m. Address below. *Alan Shapiro*

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/

Orange Audubon's Work Recognized

Orange Audubon was recognized by Audubon Florida, at its annual Audubon Assembly in mid October, with the 2026 Outstanding Conservation Project for the Apopka Birding Park restoration project.

The Apopka Birding Park, to the right of the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive, is already attracting wildlife and visitors. Monthly bird surveys, eBird and iNaturalist projects, and volunteer moth surveys are expanding knowledge of the site's biodiversity.

More than 122 bird species have been recorded, including Wild Turkeys, Painted Buntings, Blue Grosbeaks, winter sparrows and raptors. Nest boxes have been installed, including a Barn Owl box that is already occupied. A large bat box is planned. Benches have been installed, encouraging visitation.

Our restoration efforts accelerated in 2025 with the launch of monthly volunteer workdays. Retirees from environmental fields have joined Orange Audubon's Apopka Birding Park Working Group.

A major focus is protecting the gopher tortoise, a species that has lost much of its upland habitat. Volunteer surveys identified 20 active or potentially active tortoise burrows in early 2026 and protected them by staking off, according to FWC recommendations.

Volunteers also mapped approximately 90% of the property, documenting burrows, invasive cogon grass areas and concrete pads, to guide restoration. Read more on p. 3.

We encourage you to join us on this long-term project. Email info@orangeaudubonfl.org.

Orange Audubon Conservation Committee



Progress on the Natural History Museum

Orange Audubon has been working toward building a natural history museum on the 69.5 acre old greenhouse nursery site called the Apopka Birding Park. We may be receiving Orange County Tourist Development Tax (TDT) funding.

In a months-long process, starting in July, a 32-member task force, with wide representation throughout the county, reviewed TDT proposals, ranked them and made recommendations. Based on the Task Force's recommendations and discussions at a 5-hour August 25th Board of County Commissioners meeting, Orange County Mayor Jerry Demings brought recommendation to fund 13 projects before the Board of County Commissioners on October 19th. Our project is included on the list.

Apopka Mayor Nick Nesta attended the October 19th meeting and spoke in support of the project, which was the only one submitted from Apopka this year. The meeting also lasted 5 hours, and Demings' motion passed 6-1.

At another meeting on Friday, November 6th, the Tourist Development Council will be asked to recommend that the Orange County Commissioners add the 13 projects and programs to the Tourist Development Plan.

Then at a Board of County Commissioners meeting on Tuesday, December 1st, the Commission will approve this plan.

Finally, the work on funding agreements can begin. It was suggested that we bring supporters to the December 1st meeting, which is the last for Mayor Demings and Commissioners Uribe and Gomez-Cordero. If you are free to join us, email me at info@orangeaudubonfl.org.

The recommendation for our TDT funding for our museum is $12 million, $3 million per year for four years. Securing TDT funding will allow an expanded design for the building and allow Orange Audubon to use its savings, with donor permission of course, for operations, programs and the habitat restoration.

Assuming funding is secured in early 2027, construction will start and the museum will open later in 2027. The annual NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL, held the first weekend in December, will be able to host an Expo Hall in the building in early December 2027, if all goes well.

Orange Audubon's architectural firm is Little Diversified Architectural Consulting and its building contractor is R.B. Marks Construction of Winter Springs. Both are ready to go once the Orange County funding agreements are in place.



Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive with crowds, *Photo: Deborah Green*

The Apopka Birding Park will ultimately be free and open to the public from sunrise to sunset, providing a lasting conservation and educational resource for Central Florida. For further information, including naming rights for parts of the building for donors, and volunteer opportunities, contact me at info@orangeaudubonfl.org.

Deborah Green

Inside scoop from the Ambassadors

The Tourist Development Tax (TDT), sometimes called the "bed tax," added on to hotel room bills, has brought in millions each year to Orange County. Expenditure of this money by the County is carefully governed by Florida statutes. Many Orange County residents have been lobbying to use TDT to help the county's big problems of transportation and affordable housing. Unfortunately, that will require a change in statute by the Florida legislature, something brought forward last session by Representative Carlos Guillermo-Smith, without success.

Traditionally, millions in TDT funding have gone to Visit Orlando for marketing of our region's tourism (30% of the funding). Other funds have gone to our big attractions and to build and expand the Orange County Convention Center. Several of the Orange County Commissioners in the last few years worked to spread the wealth to non-profits and other entities, as long as the projects expand tourism and bring longer hotel stays.

When I was tipped off to the TDT funding opportunity (indirectly through former Orange County Commissioner Christine Moore) and applied in July, I was very proud to have data on room (continued)

ORANGE AUDUBON

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.

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(from p. 2) nights. This data was from the NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL and questionnaires we have all the festival registrants fill out.

It was only after the Task Force ranked the projects, including ours among the final 12, that I saw an interesting comment from a Task Force member. The comment was "Will only benefit the local community."

That got me thinking! Orange Audubon has had the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive Ambassador program as a way to help the St. Johns River Water Management District manage the Wildlife Drive, since staff are not there on the weekends. We started the program in 2020, July 4th weekend, during the pandemic, wearing masks.

Serving as Ambassador you see how excited the first-time visitors are to be going through this wonderful, free Wildlife Drive. And if you are willing to volunteer with us, we could really use you. We really could use some college or high school students needing service hours to reinforce the mostly retirees who currently serve.

Why am I bringing up the Ambassador program in relation to our TDT funding? Because I finally remembered. Over half the Wildlife Drive visitors are from out of town, including out of state and out of country. And most of these people *have come to Central Florida for the typical tourist attractions that are promoted by Visit Orlando.*

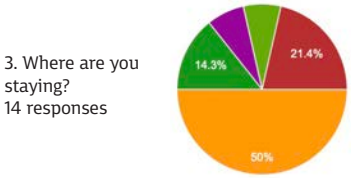
From what we learn chatting with them, they are staying down by the attractions and have just added on the Wildlife Drive as a extra day activity. With the commute from the tourist district to the Wildlife Drive being only 35-40 minutes, they are not checking out of their hotel and moving to lodging near us. They are extending their stay.

So that task force member's comment was incorrect. The Wildlife Drive, and our natural history museum when we can build it, add to the bottom line for the hoteliers, bring in extra Tourist Development Tax revenue, and the funding of our project is an appropriate use of TDT funding.

But how do we prove this? What the Ambassadors learn talking with visitors is unpublished. An assumption was that visitation would have decreased in the summer season. To the contrary, the number of visitors from the UK and other parts of Europe explodes in the summer as they enjoy long summer vacations and long-planned Florida trips.



Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive Ambassadors passing out maps and survey cards, October 2026, *Photo: Jack Horton*



First 14 respondents to our survey:

- 50% are staying in a hotel near the attractions (orange)
- 14.3% are renting a home or condo (Airbnb, Vrbo, etc.) in the tourist area (dark green)
- 21% are staying in their own home (day-trippers) (red)

These respondents are from Canada, Austria, the UK (5), Ireland (2), the Netherlands, and 5 U.S. zip codes.

So we are now doing a six-question survey to accumulate data. We pass out a business card with a QR code that takes people to the survey. See the pie chart above for first 14 responses.

Our plan is to ask Commissioner Kelly Semrad of University of Central Florida and also ask the researcher from the East Central Florida Planning Council, who was tasked with calculating return on investment, to inform us how we can make our information as verifiable as possible and better known. See our Orlando Sentinel Op-Ed as well.

Deborah Green

What's new with the restoration?

With advice from people familiar with habitat restoration, Orange Audubon has begun the long road to convert a greenhouse nursery back to native habitat, a "rewilding" process.

An obstacle is widespread presence of cogongrass, a highly invasive weed pest, but we are working with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) Upland grant program and the City of Apopka on herbicide treatments.

Our other major obstacle is the presence of the concrete pads that were the bases of the old greenhouses that burned down circa 1999. The St. Johns River Water Management District has now removed the concrete pads to use the concrete for roadwork and other construction projects. After removal, their contractor is seeding with winter rye and millet, as suggested by our FWC Upland grant contact. These two annuals wil help keep down unwanted species and will allow us to see what native species germinate. A subgroup of our Apopka Birding Park Working group has been planning test plantings. Thank you so much to the St. Johns River Water Management District for the concrete pad removal! It is a milestone.

Deborah Green

Speaking Up for the Econ

As Conservation Committee Chair, I made public comment at the October 24th Orange County Board of County Commissioners meeting in support of the staff recommendation to deny certification of the proposed Lake Pickett North (Sustanee) development as an "Agricultural Enclave" which would force its approval under a new law (SB 686). Why? 1. The property is east of the Urban Service Boundary. 2. The property is within the Econlockhatchee River Watershed. The Econ River has been designated an Outstanding Florida Water and deserves extra protection. 3. Pollution sources associated with urban development can and will make their way through permitted retention ponds. The new criteria for retention ponds, designed to meet the most stringent requirement of Outstanding Florida Waters, will still allow 5% of total annual phosphorus pollutant loading into receiving waters, even if they are constructed and maintained to the highest engineering standards. 4. The property is a combination of upland flat meadows adjacent to wetlands, which is a unique and disappearing habitat needed by many bird species. 5. Traffic patterns are becoming increasingly congested in the Lake Pickett area. Local residents deserve urban development to be managed by local leaders, not legislators in Tallahassee. One size does not fit all. The unanimous vote of the Commissioners was to deny, following follow staff recommendations. Thanks to Charles Lee for alerting us.

Rick Baird

North Shore Bird Survey Report

Seventeen of us braved the mosquitoes at the McDonald Canal to draw for routes. The winds picked up, and Harriers and Red-shoulders were swooping around. Migrating hawks seem to be using the winds as well. Several Sharp-shinned and Cooper's were up high moving south or using the North Shore as a stopping ground to feed. Peregrine, Merlin, and Kestrels were all active. It was not a good day for small birds, being so windy.

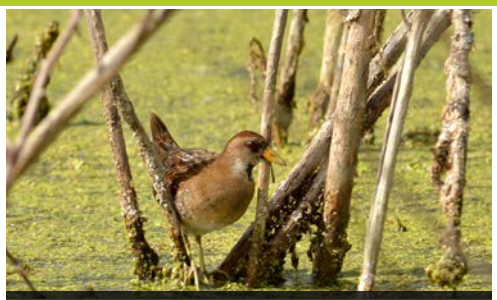
We covered 10 sections of the survey and recorded 98 species, including seven species of waterfowl. The highlight was 202 Blue-winged Teal. Afterwards I ran the drive purposely looking for Blue-winged Teal and counted 411.

Two Chimney Swifts was a nice late pick-up. Rails are arriving and as most species when they first arrive, they are charged up from hopefully a successful breeding season. At one point on Leg 1 Sora were calling from all angles. Thirty-five Sora calling were tallied for the group, with 4 Virginia and 1 King Rail. Generally, we get about 6 to 12 Purple for the survey, today only 1. Maybe they don't like windy days. We saw 34 Gray-headed Swamphen. We saw 4 species of shorebirds, including 9 Snipe and 7 Greater Yellowlegs. Look for these numbers to go up as wintering shorebirds settle in.

Pied-billed Grebes are returning in droves. We saw 108 of these. Watch for them in tight migrating flocks, especially now as they are arriving from the north. Two Limpkins.

With the winds, raptors were the hot ticket: 8 Black Vulture, 78 Turkey Vultures, 37 Ospreys, 4 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 3 Cooper's Hawks, 12 Northern Harriers, 10 Bald Eagles, 41 Red-shouldered Hawks, 4 Kestrels and 3 Peregrine Falcons. Welcome back Belted Kingfishers, 32 for this date. In case anyone needs Eastern Phoebe for the year, we had 146. Fifty-two Barn Swallows was good. Wrens are definitely using the North Shore: 89 Northern House Wrens, 20 Sedge Wrens, 29 newly split Eastern Marsh Wrens and 32 Carolina Wrens. We had 5 species of sparrow, with Song, Lincolns, White-crowned and an incredible 251 Swamp (just think how many are actually out there). Migrating passerines seem to have already passed through. Our awesome team gathered up some, but it was slim pickins: 7 species of warblers with 116 Common Yellowthroats and 113 Palms. One Blue Grosbeak, 2 Indigo Buntings, and 1 Painted Bunting rounded out the October North Shore Bird Survey. Thanks again for everyone coming out and helping. The next survey will be Tuesday, November 24th.

Chris Newton, Compiler



Top, Sora at the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive, *Photo: Joyce Stefancic*

Bird-Friendly Yards Tour

A key strategy to promote use of native plants is to provide examples of the plants in place after several years of growth. Last year, for the first time since 2016, Orange Audubon hosted a Native Plants Yards Tour, co-sponsored by the Florida Native Plant Society, Tarflower Chapter, and Wild Birds Unlimited, Winter Springs. We repeated the event this year on October 4th, timed to be before the Tarflower Chapter's Backyard Biodiversity Day at Mead Botanical Garden, where native plants were for sale.

Eight homeowners enthusiastically showed off their yards, some with new, others with mature native landscapes, and others featuring bird feeders attracting Painted Buntings, goldfinches, and more. Thanks very much to the homeowners: Deborah Green, Jim and Mary Helmers, Marge Holt, Katie March, Tony Rodriguez, Melissa Steinberg, Logan Templeton and Jennifer Thompson. Each of the landscapes was different, but plants that showed up in most of the landscapes included American Beautyberry, Firebush and Elliott's Lovegrass.

Last year's list plants in each yard is posted on Orange Audubon's website at this link. Showing off my yard, which I also did back in 2016, I emphasized two trees that host caterpillars fed upon by songbirds. These are sugarberry, *Celtis laevigata*, and Wild Black Cherry, *Prunus serotina*.

Thanks to the essential volunteers, especially my co-organizer Neta Villalobos-Bell and to Gabbie Milch. Other volunteers who kept things running smoothly were Kristopher Davis and son, Bob and Brenda Elmquist, Leslie Hill, Meena Iyer, Melisa and Neisha Mercado, Deb Rouleau, Alan Shapiro, Jessie Sodano and Susan Thome-Barrett.

Including a generous employer matching donation, the event garnered about $900 toward Orange Audubon's fundraising.

Deborah Green

Backyard Biodiversity Day Volunteers Appreciated

For the 11th year, Backyard Biodiversity Day (BBD) at Mead Botanical Garden was a great event, through which our chapter supports the Tarflower Chapter, Florida Native Plant Society in their promotion of native plants.

Orange Audubon is proud to have co-sponsored BBD since its inception. Proceeds of the plant sales go toward the upland habitat restoration that Tarflower is doing at Mead.

Thanks to Mary Van Egmond for staffing Orange Audubon's display at BBD, along with Rick Baird, Bob and Brenda Elmquist, Anne Merrill, Deb Rouleau and Alan Shapiro. Thanks, Alan, for the Lucy display.





Above, Orange Audubon booth at Backyard Biodiversity Day. *Photo: Alan Shapiro*. Bottom, second October fall migration bird walk. *Photo: Jimena Aguirre*

Fall Migration Bird Walks at Mead

Orange Audubon's Mead Botanical Garden Fall Migration Bird Walks were each Saturday in October and were another great success. Over 150 people participated over the 5 Saturdays.

The second Saturday was one of the best days ever for warblers, according to Alex DeBear. We recruited several Young Birders for our later trips. Thanks to our guides: Jimena Aguirre, Glenn Blaser, Abbie Clark, Alex DeBear, Linda Gaunt, Colin Giebner, Chuck Honaker, Haden Klinger, Susan Morris, Vanessa Picariello, Matt Richardson, Kathy Rigling and Alan Shapiro.

Linda Gaunt



Board member profile
Linda Gaunt

Linda Gaunt is Orange Audubon's secretary and spearheads several initiatives, taking time away from her day job in Human Relations at Siemens.

She was elected Orange Audubon secretary in 2018 and has served in that capacity since. For the past five years, Linda has chaired Orange Audubon's annual fundraising auction on Bidding Owl. The auction raised approximately $7500 toward our capital campaign this past year.

Linda steps up each spring and fall to coordinate the Mead Botanical Garden bird walks, which often have 40 or more participants.

Linda is also an Audubon Eagle Watch volunteer. The photo was taken upon her graduation from the training program. Over the past 11 years she has monitored six eagle nests through this Audubon Florida Program. We appreciate you, Linda.



Christmas Bird Counts
December 14, 2026 through January 5, 2027

Add to over a century of citizen science data by signing up for a count near you.

The annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is now in its 127th year.

Dr. Frank Chapman, founder of *Bird-Lore,* which evolved into *Audubon* magazine, founded the CBC in 1900. He wanted to develop an alternative to the holiday "side hunt," in which teams competed to see who could shoot the most birds.

The CBC uses over 70,000 volunteer bird counters in more than 2,400 locations across the Western Hemisphere to track the health of bird populations at a scale that professional scientists alone could never accomplish.

As an example of the use of this data, the *Science* magazine report documenting the decline of bird populations by 2.9 billion over the past 50 years relied heavily on this long-term bird population study carried out by citizen scientists.

Each individual count is performed in a count circle with a diameter of 15 miles. The volunteers break up into small parties and follow assigned routes, which change little from year to year, and record every bird they see.

Birders' natural competitive spirit drives them to do the most thorough job possible.

The CBCs in our area with contact information for their compilers are on p.8. Join us!

Green PLACE Nature & Photography Hike, November 14, 2026

For many years, Orange Audubon has promoted Orange County's Conservation land program, Green PLACE (PLACE stands for Park Land Acquisition for Conservation and Environmental Protection), by co-hosting family-oriented photo walks. The fall walk is to Crosby Island Marsh Preserve in east Orange County. This newer preserve features 240 to 277 acres of sandhill, oak-pine woodland, and central wet prairie marsh habitats. Address is 13601 Moss Park Rd, Orlando, FL 32832.

The walk will be Saturday, November 14th, 9:00–11:30 AM and is FREE. Leaders are Lee Ann Posavad and Alex DeBear, wildlife photographers, along with Orange County Green PLACE naturalists. Register by calling Green PLACE at (407) 836-1408.

PEAR Park Free Monthly Trip, November 14, 2026

Join Orange Audubon as we visit one of our favorite Lake County parks, PEAR Park in Leesburg. This park on the Palatlakaha River encompasses 318 acres with eight distinctive ecosystems and is in active restoration.



Birders at Pear Park, NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL. *Photo: Craig Watson*

We should be able to observe many species of wintering songbirds and raptors including possibly Vesper Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Orange -crowned Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Blue-headed Vireo, American Goldfinch, Eastern Towhee, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Northern Harrier, Merlin, American Kestrel and Bald Eagle.

The trip leaders are Kathy Rigling and Alex DeBear. This field trip is free but spots are limited. To reserve a spot visit our website https://orangeaudubonfl.org/activities/field-trips/. If you have any questions, contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com.

Pine Meadows Conservation Area, November 8, 2026

On Sunday, November 8th, Kathy Rigling and Jimena Aguirrre will lead a Limited-Edition Field Trip to Pine Meadows Conservation Area in Eustis. Pine Meadows is a 770-acre Lake County park with open water, wetlands, wet meadow and a small upland area of pine flatwoods. Habitat restoration continues to improve the wetlands, uplands and meadows to increase biodiversity of fish, birds and other animals.

Nearly 120 bird species have been seen, including the Henslow's Sparrow, American Kestrel, Sedge Wren, Eastern Bluebird, Eastern Towhee, Pine Warbler, Prairie Warbler, and Indigo Bunting.

Limited Edition Field Trips have limited spots. Cost per trip is $15 for members and $20 for non-members.

To reserve a spot visit our website: https://orangeaudubonfl.org/field-trip-signup/ f you have any questions, contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com.



Young Birders Club

The Orange Audubon chapter of the Florida Young Birders Club enjoyed a tour of the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey on October 11th. For this outing, we welcomed younger students who really enjoyed learning about all the raptors that are residents at this center in Maitland. The youngsters were enthralled by the very vocal Red-shouldered Hawk, the regal Peregrine Falcon, the majestic Bald Eagle, and of course, the beautiful owls, comfortable in their new enclosure. Orange Audubon appreciates the generosity of Daisy Fiore and the staff of the Birds of Prey Center for providing this very engaging activity.

The next Young Birders Club field trip will be an outing to Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive. This field trip is for 8-17 year old youths who are interested in learning more about birds and nature.

Bring your young birder on a field trip to one of Central Florida's best birding locations! We're going to see how many species we can find from 7 a.m.- 12 p.m! Leaders are Ethan and Brennan Landreville and Haden Klinger from the Florida Young Birders Club.

This trip will be a combination of driving the 11-mile wildlife drive and getting out and walking short distances to view a variety of birds and other wildlife.

Register now at : https://orangeaudubonfl.org/field-trip-signup/.Spots are limited. For questions about the Young Birders Club contact education@orangeaudubonfl.org.

Kathy Rigling, Education Coordinator

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. 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, Volunteer Coordinator

Education Program Update

The Orange Audubon educational programs were off and running in October. With lower humidity and slightly cooler temperatures, teachers have been scheduling our visits.

This month we completed bird counts with 19 different classes. We did two different days with the sixth grade at Freedom Middle School, which is a new school for us. The highlights at Freedom Middle were seeing adult and juvenile Mockingbirds interacting, various wading birds flying over and a very cooperative Loggerhead Shrike. The students were very interested in its behavior.

We also traveled to University High School to work with several different teachers to help the high school students understand how to complete a scientific bird count. Several of the students commented before we started that there were no birds on their campus. They were pleasantly surprised to see Eastern Bluebirds, a Loggerhead Shrike, an American Kestrel, a Red-tailed Hawk, and even a Cape May Warbler in one of their oak trees.

We also traveled to Seminole Springs Elementary to help the 4th graders conduct their first bird count. The students were amazed to see Pine Warblers on the ground, Red-bellied Woodpeckers feeding in the oak trees and even a Merlin speeding through the sky!

We also continued collaborating with Girl Scouts of Citrus Council to provide a program on flowers at Mead Botanical Garden with the Junior Girl Scouts. That program included a lot of observation of pollinators visiting various flowers and discussion of the benefits of native plants.



A Broad-billed Hummingbird from Mexico was swept off course by Hurricane Isaias and survived on nectar of Firebush and bugs at the Apopka Birding Park for over a week. A juvenile female, this rarity brought birders from all over Florida. *Photo: Rafael Gomez*



Zellwood Elementary after school program doing bird survey. *Photo: Kathy Rigling.*

We continued our monthly visits to Zellwood Elementary. This month, the first graders worked on their observation skills by observing bugs in their schoolyard. They had great fun finding beetles, ants, flies and other small critters.

The Zellwood Elementary after school birding club studied migration, and then we observed the birds in their habitat improvement area. We got to witness a huge flock of brown-headed cowbirds in a flight murmuration.

This month we were invited to present three adult programs. One was for the Life explorers at Mead Gardens about the magic of migration. Another was for Backyard Biodiversity Day about the importance of habitat for bird diversity and migration. Lastly, we also did a program for the Florida Trail Association about birding while hiking.

We also completed our Fall Beginning Bird Watching classes. Our beginner birders enjoyed their classes at Orlando Wetlands, Mead Botanical Gardens and the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive. They even ended the class with a rare, out of season bird – an American Pipit!

Our next monthly free educational webinar will be on November 11th from 7:00-7:30 pm with a program about Project Feeder Watch for classrooms. The link to sign up is http://eepurl.com/imGskMs.

Altogether this month, we reached 576 students and 214 adults through our programs. A big thank you to our education volunteers for helping to make these programs possible: Terrie Leibler, Holly Hobart, Randy McCall and Susan Thome-Barrett.

Please email education@orangeaudubonfl.org to sign up for classroom or after school group visits. If you would like to volunteer to help with a bird count or other educational program please email me as well. Thanks!

Kathy Rigling, Education Coordinator



2026 NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL

Although Orange Audubon Society's 11th annual NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL is not until December 3-7, 2026, now is the time to register to get in on the action. Many trips are full, but there are still some great slots.

Filmmaker Jim Cunningham has created two short promotional videos, posted on northshorebirdingfestival.com.

A strength of our festival is our young trip leaders. The youngest trip leader, age 16, co-leads with his father. Several trip leaders who received their start with us have gone on to guide at larger festivals and for prestigious companies.

Since its 2016 launch, attendance has grown steadily, with 350 participants in 2024 from 18 states and over 70 Florida cities. The festival aims to expand its national reach, spark return visits, raise awareness of Central Florida's natural treasures and contribute ecotourism dollars to the area. It showcases the region's conservation value and habitat protection efforts.

Once Orange Audubon's natural history museum is built, the festival will include a free Expo Hall with displays by optics and tour companies, allowing added community engagement.

Community Impact

Over 60 field trips extend over 5 days, Thursday through Monday, December 3-7, 2026. Most trips are for birding but a number are tailored for photographers.
Our great birding locations and our incredible trip leaders are what makes this festival grow and participants return year after year. The festival brings together a critical mass of leaders and participants to catch up on their common interest—birding.

The start location for most field trips is the McDonald Canal Pavilion, 24600 CR 448A, Mount Dora, FL 32757.

We have again been able to rent the Wekiwa Springs State Park Youth Camp, as a place to house out-of-town leaders. This enables new trips and dinners Friday and Saturday nights in the Youth Camp Dining Hall.

On Friday, our keynote speaker is Alex Lamoreaux on "Beyond just the Bird - Looking more closely at subspecies and other identifiable forms of Florida birds!" Menu is pizza and salad, including vegan options.

The Saturday Keynote is by Bob Duchesne, "Maine to Florida With the Birds." Catered by Krazy Greek Kitchen in Lake Mary, our volunteers put together a great spread.

Bob is a very well known Maine birder. After a 31-year career in radio, he retired from broadcasting and developed the Maine Birding Trail as a vehicle for promoting ecotourism in Maine. His YouTube channel, started in 2011, now has 29K subscribers.

For the keynote dinners, which are at Wekiwa Springs State Park, you have to enter the gate before the park closes at 5 p.m. Sign up for a workshop before dinner or a trip after dinner at the park.

We will have Nature Journaling this year, along with Drawing from Nature and Plein Aire Drawing. These classes are Friday and Saturday (at Wekiwa) and Sunday (at McDonald Canal).

Forty-five leaders, including professional guides, donate their time to lead trips, supported by 20+ volunteers, including the event coordinators. Proceeds of the NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL support Orange Audubon's natural history museum and educational programs. If you have any questions, email festival@orangeaudubonfl.org or call (407) 637-2525. Visit the festival website at https://northshorebirdingfestival.com/.

We look forward to having you with us!







Evening on the North Shore trip, 2025. *Photo: Lorri Lilja.* Digiscoping workshop. *Photo: Deborah Green.* Clay-colored Sparrow, a difficult to find winter sparrow. *Photo: Nicola Dronoff-Guthrie.*

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bird Chats with Orange Audubon via Zoom
Nov 5 – Echos of the Night Sky Project by Brad Bumgardner
Nov 12 – Bluebird Basics/Project Nestwatch by Kristen Mattson
Nov 26, Dec 3, 24 and 31 – No Bird Chat, FESTIVAL, holidays
See past Bird Chats on Orange Audubon Society on YouTube

Wekiwa Springs State Park Bird Survey, Apopka
November 7, 2026
Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

Limited Edition Field Trip: Pine Meadows, Lake County
November 8, 2026
Register: https://orangeaudubonfl.org/activities/field-trips/

Monthly Field Trip: PEAR Park, Lake County
November 14, 2026
Register: https://orangeaudubonfl.org/activities/field-trips/

Fall Green PLACE trip to Crosby Marsh, Orange County November 14, 2026
Register with Green PLACE (407) 836-1408

Sparrows of Florida, November Monthly Program, Leu Gardens
November 19, 2026
Contact Deborah at info@orangeaudubonfl.org

Young Birders Trip to Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive
November 21, 2026
Contact Kathy at riglingkathy@gmail.com

North Shore Bird Survey
November 24, 2026
Contact Deborah at info@orangeaudubonfl.org

Apopka Birding Park Bird Survey
November 28, 2026
Contact Alex at alexdebear@icloud.com

Apopka Birding Park Workday
November 28, 2026
Contact Deborah at info@orangeaudubonfl.org

NORTH SHORE BIRDING FESTIVAL, Lake Apopka
Dec 3-7, 2026
Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

Birds Up Close, December Monthly Program on Zoom
December 17, 2026
Contact Deborah at info@orangeaudubonfl.org

Christmas Bird Counts

- Bay Lake: Saturday, December 19, 2026. Contact John Thomton at john.thomton@gmail.com
- Wekiva River: Saturday, December 19, 2026. Contact Jay Exum at jay.h.exum@gmail.com
- Zellwood/Mt. Dora: Thursday, December 17, 2026. Contact Gallus Quigley at gallusq@gmail.com
- Kissimmee Valley: Sunday, December 20, 2026. Contact Chris Newton at dexterdevon68@gmail.com
- Emeralda Marsh: Monday, December 21, 2026. Contact Gigi DelPizzo at h2otrailgal@gmail.com
- Econlockhatchee: Saturday, December 26, 2026. Contact Lorne Malo at lornekmalo@gmail.com
- Christmas: Tuesday, December 29, 2026. Contact Sandy Bauerschmidt at sandyxmas2023@gmail.com
- Clermont: Sunday, January 3, 2027. Contact John Thomton at john.thomton@gmail.com.

Update Your Membership

November is a great time to renew your 3-way membership in Orange Audubon Society, Audubon Florida and National Audubon Society. Please pay directly to Orange Audubon, and we transmit the funds to National. The minimum membership dues are $20 ($15 for students). If you want to include an additional donation, which goes to Orange Audubon, you can. Just click the Join/Renew link on our website. If you need your expiration date, email membership@orangeaudubonfl.org. Thank you!

Your Contributions Really Help

Orange Audubon's donors have been amazing! We promise we will recognize you in the next issue, but your generous donations are what make us able to continue forward toward our natural history museum and other educational efforts.

Donations to Orange Audubon are tax-deductible to the extent permitted by law. You can donate online from our website, orangeaudubonfl.org, including making monthly donations, or mail checks to Orange Audubon Society, P.O. Box 274, Apopka, FL 32704.

For those with IRAs who are over 70 1/2 years of age, making **qualified charitable distributions** (QCDs) directly to non-profits, including Orange Audubon Society, may count towards your required minimum distribution, providing a significant tax benefit. Speak with your fund manager to set this up. Thank you!

Deborah Green, President
with Sue Weidner, Treasurer



Peru Adventure, April 25 - May 3, 2027

Orange Audubon's next big international trip is to Peru with Holbrook Travel in late April through early May. The 9-day trip begins in vibrant Lima and nearby coastal areas before continuing to the Andean highlands, home to the Sacred Valley of the Incas and the famed Machu Picchu archaeological complex. Price is from $4,595, which does not include round-trip airfare to and from destination. See Holbrook's webpage: Peru | Birding Andes, Cloud Forest and Machu Picchu. The price includes a contribution to Orange Audubon's fundraising. Contact Alan Shapiro at alangrandiflora@gmail.com if you have any questions.