

Laughing Gull

The Newsletter of the St. Lucie Audubon Society



Volume 31 Issue #1

P.O. Box 12474, Fort Pierce, FL 34979

October 2006

Welcome to new members!

Irene
Arpayoglou
H Leo Greif
Anne Hankins
Roberto Illa
Barbara Larkin
Mel Marshall
Dan McDevitt
Essie Norman-
Muriel Odonnell
Olive Peterson
J Roddenberry
Mary Sink
Sally Eral
Dorothy Cowden
Alice Pinsince



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President's Message

By Al Parmentier

As I write this, the first cool front is passing over south Florida. It reminds me of the great three-month trip Gale and I took this summer. We traveled over 15,000 miles with our camper trailer. We spent much of May in CA where we had a waterfront site on San Diego's Mission Bay, then visited King's Canyon, Sequoia, and Yosemite National Parks. Our route next took us quickly through NV to a hiking Elderhostel in the Snake River valley of ID, stops in three ID state parks, then into Alberta, Canada to visit Banff and Jasper National Parks and Calgary during June.

By July we headed southward into MT to Glacier National Park where evidence of global warming is obvious. The rangers informed us there will be no glaciers left in the park by 2031. By the time we arrived in ND, we decided to flee the intense heat for two weeks exploring MI's Upper Peninsula with its many fabulous national and state parks.

Not only was the scenery beautiful, but the adventure gave us the opportunity for the most serious birding we have ever attempted, adding many species to our life lists. Particularly memorable to us were the efforts we put into sightings of the Western Meadowlark, Harlequin Duck, American Dipper, and Black Swift. We hope to share our adventures at a general meeting later this winter.

Our St. Lucie Audubon season will open with the first general membership meeting on Thursday, October 5th at the Oxbow Eco-Center and a field trip to Oak Hammock on Saturday, October 9th. Hope to see you there. I would like to remind everyone that a chapter-only membership is available for only \$15 (which importantly supports our local organization but does not include a subscription to the National Audubon magazine).

Here's hoping you had a pleasant summer and some good birding experiences!



Calendar of Events

October Meeting:

Thursday, October 5 at 7 p.m.

Paul Miller from the Florida Park Service will present a program on the Grasshopper Sparrow, an endangered species.

October Field Trip:

Oak Hammock Park in Port St. Lucie.
(See details on back page).

Meeting Place Location:

Oxbow Eco-Center
5400 NE St. James Drive
Port St. Lucie, FL 34983
(772) 785-5833

Other events of interest:

"Wake Up Call" Lecture Series
Saturday, November 4th;
11 am @ Oxbow Eco-Center:
"Bringing Home the Green"

Susan Cerulean, noted writer, naturalist and activist, will be speaking about making a difference in our communities. As a founding member of the Heart of the Earth "intentional" community in north FL, she invites others to live more sustainably by taking an inventory of one's lifestyle choices. Come learn how you can make a difference! Free! Free shade-grown/bird friendly coffee if you bring your own mug!

Conservation Corner

By Harold Phillips

Since our last newsletter, several issues have come to our attention because they have impacts on our environment. These include conserving land in exchange for development rights at another location, and a plan to develop cargo at the Port at Ft. Pierce. Dolphins in the Indian River Lagoon continue to die. How long can water be supplied to meet the demands of rapid growth like Tradition, Cloud Grove, and similar projects already approved? We will be covering some of these issues in future newsletters.

Recently a plan to conserve thousands of acres at a ranch in the County so that the land cannot ever be developed has been considered by the St. Lucie County Commissioners. The proposal includes a Stewardship agreement where the owners agree to conserve the land in exchange for development rights that can be sold to any interested developer with a requirement that the development is built elsewhere in the County. By agreement, development rights allow more units of development than are allowed by the Comprehensive Plan and at a location in a rural area that would not normally be allowed. The proposal is for a new town with up to 12,000 houses to be built in north county where planning would require large areas of open space to be preserved with higher density where the homes will be built. The aim would be to make the town as self sufficient as possible with its own water supply, sewage treatment system and schools. To do this, the County will have to change their Comprehensive Plan and obtain a somewhat formal approval from the Department of Community Affairs.

This plan comes with many advantages and disadvantages. Most would agree that it is a good plan to conserve land in its natural state so that it is preserved from future development especially when it is a very large tract of several thousand acres. The question is though at what cost and is it worth developing less desirable land elsewhere in the County to build a new town of

12,000 homes attracting another 30,000 people, retail and commercial and local government amenities, along with the uncertainty of a water supply to meet these long term needs?

Other questions include how much is one unit (say one home site) as a transferable development right worth to a developer and how much will a developer pay for them? If you can buy approval to build four new homes in an area where normally you would only be allowed to build one, how much would you be willing to pay for this privilege? If the cost to the developer/builder is too high they will not buy them and the project would not progress, if they are too generous, will we be getting more development and growth management headaches than it is truly worth.

You will recall that we support the Hometown Democracy Group who are strong advocates for responsible and carefully managed growth. Their initial goal is to have a referendum on the 2008 election ballot that if approved would not allow changes to a Comprehensive Plan unless it be approved by the electors in a referendum. This would be instead of piecemeal decisions by each County as requests to build outside of the current regulations are received and pursued by lawyers for their numerous and varied applicants who see a need to change the rules of responsible planning that the County has been trying to adhere to.

If all the County comprehensive plans in Florida are built to the level already approved the population of Florida will exceed 100,000,000 by many millions of people. What do you see as the ideal population for St. Lucie County?

The resident two bald eagles who return to nest each year at Tesoro in Port St. Lucie will be returning soon. This year they had two fledglings. For their coming season a camera has been placed near the nest and you will be able to view the nest site in a tree in Tesoro. The Ginn Company redesigned a part of their development to accommodate the nest. Audubon of Florida's web site: audubonofflorida.org/friendsoftheeagle has photos of the eagles and more information. The camcorder will operate soon once the eagles return to their nest sometime this fall. Check it out now to see if the eagles are back and if they've started to nest yet!

SLAS is now offering a Chapter-only annual membership option for those who want to financially support their local chapter. The annual cost is only \$15 per year, which includes monthly subscription to our "Laughing Gull" newsletter. Please make checks payable and send to:

St. Lucie Audubon Society
P.O. Box 12474, Ft. Pierce, FL 34979

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____
 State _____ Zip _____
 Phone _____
 Email _____

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Membership Renewals

Chapter memberships extend from October through May. Chapter members may use the coupon at left to renew membership for 2007.

Please mark RENEW on your check.

Feathered Friends

by Dotty & Hank Hull

We hope everyone had a wonderful summer filled with activity and included some nature watching. Now we are experiencing the fall migration of birds, when birds that left Florida in the spring to go north to breed make their way back to spend the winter here or further south. Some will travel as far as Mexico and South America.

Some of the migrating species may be looking for food and water in your yard. Clean water in a birdbath or shallow container will be useful to all birds on their long migration route. Seed-eating birds will come to eat at your feeders. Suet is used by woodpeckers and sometimes wrens. Wait for the weather to cool down before putting fresh suet out.

Watching bird behavior can bring some surprises and is always interesting, such as the scene we witnessed in a parking space at a local grocery store. We noticed six molting Boat-tailed Grackles on the concrete near several discarded small loaves of very hard, stale Italian bread. The birds tried unsuccessfully to break into the loaves until one finally made a hole in the top of a loaf. It kept striking the loaf and getting only a few small crumbs. After that one backed off, the others would come to the opened loaf, one by one getting a few small bread crumbs and moving away.

We proceeded into the store and did some shopping. About 45 minutes later, we returned to the car to find all of the loaves had been broken into smaller pieces, but still larger than bite size. Next we saw several grackles picking up a larger piece of bread with the beak and taking it to a small puddle three cars down. There they dipped the bread in the water to soften it and then ate it. Smart grackles!

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October 5 Meeting

Paul Miller from the Florida Park Service will present a program on the Grasshopper Sparrow, an endangered species.

October 7 Field Trip

Our first field trip of the season will be to Oak Hammock Park in Port St. Lucie. We will meet at the Sears Essential store in St. Lucie West at 7:30 a.m. The store is on the west end of the Publix plaza on St. Lucie West Blvd. (which is the continuation of Prima Vista.) We will meet in parking spaces closest to the main street.

Audubon Assembly Goes to the Beach! Saving Birds and Special Spaces Oct 19-21, Cocoa Beach

Join Audubon of Florida for engaging programs that highlight Florida's coastal environments and issues that affect their wellbeing. Get inspired and sharpen skills for advocating for birds and their protection. Hear scientists share insights on global warming and its consequences for Florida's extensive coastal areas. Collaborate with other environmentalists and birders from across the region to shape policies and take an active part in saving our birds, wildlife, and habitats. Enjoy one of Florida's best beaches while you catch up with friends, colleagues, and fellow Audubon members. Field trips will take in some of Florida's birding hot spots, so don't forget the binoculars! Visit http://www.audubonofflorida.org/conservation_assembly.html for more info. and to register.

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