

Laughing Gull

The Newsletter of the St. Lucie Audubon Society



Volume 30 No. 6

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

March 2006

Welcome to new members!

Noel & Nadine Conley
V. Constantine
TS Cully
Pirri & Eleanor Epler
John Flanagan
Robert Kahn
Egon Lauterberg
Monika & David Liddle
Leslie Lukat
Diane Matheson
Jean Melby
Gloria Monahan
Hector Ruiz-Puyana
Walter Roginski
David Stutsman
Sue Warden
Bill Wink
Caralee Johnson



Get your Laughing Gull by email

Do the "Green Thing" and help our chapter save printing and mailing costs by getting your newsletter by email. Send your name & email address to flbird40@bellsouth.net to sign up.

President's Message

by Al Parmentier

Will wonders never cease! New species of animals have just recently been discovered in Papua, New Guinea's mountains over an untouched, two million acre area. The animals found were so tame that the scientists were able to walk right up to them and pick them up. Should these animals be removed and placed in zoos?

This is a philosophical question. How do we balance the desire to expand knowledge and experience the beauty of these new creatures with their right to remain in their native habitats? I'm glad I don't have to make these decisions.

Speaking of expanding knowledge and experiencing the beauty of nature, it may not be too late to register for the last two sessions of the Beginning Birding Classes. Call the Oxbow Eco-Center at 785-5833 for more information.

Also, make sure you reserve your spot to see Painted and Indigo Buntings on March 25th. See details at right.

Meeting Place Location:

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

Calendar of Events

March meeting: Thursday, March 2nd, 7:00 pm @ Oxbow; **Eric Draper**, from **Audubon of Florida**, will present a program on **Innovative Development**.

March field trip: Saturday, March 4th to **Wakodahatchee Wetlands** in Boynton Beach (Details on back page.)

Birding Classes

"Introduction to Birding" classes: Tuesday evenings February 21st, Feb 28th and March 7th from 7-9 pm. Field trips Saturdays following the class by St. Lucie Audubon. Cost is only \$30. **For more details, call the Oxbow @ 785-5833.**

RSVP

Painted Bunting Trip March 25

Join us for a special trip to private residence to see Painted & Indigo Buntings. Meet: Ft. Pierce Home Depot; 8:30 am. Cost \$10 per person; limit 30 people. **Call Dotty at 340-2226 to reserve.**

Conservation Corner

by Harold Phillips

With the dry seasonal winter months, there is much less nutrient run off into our local rivers and the Indian River Lagoon and the prospect of improved water quality and a reduced risk of a toxic algae bloom.

During the past five years, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) have routinely altered and weakened the standards that regulated the quality of emissions into our air and toxins into our rivers. As a result, the St. Johns River has become one of the most (nutrient) polluted rivers in the South East of Florida.

After further moves by the DEP along with sewage companies and other polluters to allow even higher levels of pollution, a citizens lawsuit was filed. The lawsuit has been successful against the EPA. The St. Johns Riverkeeper and Clean Water Network are two of the plaintiffs who took the case against the E.P.A. This has resulted in the EPA being required to take a closer look at the State's pollution limits. The EPA has now found them to be inadequate under the Clean Water Act. "It is a shame that citizens have to sue the government to make them follow the law, but we are grateful that we still have that ability in this country" said Linda Young of the Clean Water Network.

Incredibly, Florida DEP, along with industrial polluters and sewage companies, vowed to keep fighting to put more pollution in our rivers. In January they held a workshop to outline plans to change the law that sets the minimum oxygen levels needed to maintain healthy fish populations. In the same month, January 2006, a bottlenose dolphin was reported guarding the carcass of her firstborn in front of her as she swam slowly around the Indian River Lagoon near the St. Lucie Inlet.

Dolphins in the lagoon are now absorbing such high levels of toxins before they reach sexual maturity that their calves only have a 50 percent survival rate. Because of the state of our rivers dolphins have less chance of surviving into adulthood because they have to rely on their mother's milk, which often contains high levels of toxins. The dolphins poor condition is surely a wake up call to stop adding further pollution to our waterways and rivers and set about reducing the pollution we have.

The EPA has said it will take a look at the DEP's plans to change the water quality standards when they are submitted for approval. We think with the successful law suit on their minds the E.P.A. will reject any further plans by DEP to add more pollution to the St. Johns River.

It may take a similar citizens lawsuit to save the Indian River Lagoon from more toxic algae blooms but with homeowners, developers, sugar growers, and dairy farmers all adding to the nutrient load then water managers must start by making a commitment to intervene in all areas where pollutants are being allowed to enter the canals, lakes and rivers of the Treasure Coast area.

Eagle Watch Update

by Bob Carey

Good news concerning St Lucie County eagles' nests. Twelve of the thirteen nests in the county were blown down or damaged by Hurricane Wilma. All of the nests have been rebuilt and the adult eagles are either incubating eggs or they have eaglets. Several watchers have reported seeing two eaglets: Hank and Dotty Hull, nest SL006 by the Wal-Mart Center; Dick and Elaine Derleth, nest SL005 north of The Savannah Club; and nest SL012 at the Adams Ranch. We need a watcher for the nest by Glades Cut off road. If anyone is interested please call Bob at 879-7488. Thanks!

Feathered Friends

by Dotty & Hank Hull

There have been a number of rare birds reported by birders in St. Lucie County this winter. The first week of February brought a report of 3 Scissor-tailed Flycatchers on the north side of State Route 70 west of Header Canal Road. Hart and Jewel Rufe drove out to look for the birds and found 2 Western Kingbirds perched with the Flycatchers in the pines north of the citrus grove. They watched the group of birds fly south across Route 70 to the power lines. There have been numerous reports of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers in Florida this winter. One other report in St. Lucie County was seen on Carlton Road, just north of Germany Canal Road. All of these birds could still be present since the Flycatchers reported in the state usually stay the winter.

We have had as many as 51 Black-bellied Whistling Ducks spending time at our feeders this winter. This Mexican species was previously seen in Florida only in near Sarasota but have now begun to spread east from Texas throughout the southeastern United States. If anyone would like to see the ducks, they can call us to make arrangements.

The beaches on South Hutchinson Island have hosted at least 2 Lesser Black-backed Gulls. This European species is becoming much more common in Florida. Many Magnificent Frigatebirds have recently been seen near the beaches on North & South Hutchinson Islands.

Environmentalist @ Home

by Gale Parmentier

World's First Biodegradable Bottle!

BIOTA, Blame It On The Altitude, has developed a compostable and biodegradable bottle made from corn. Corn creates natural starches. With the help of microorganisms, these starches are converted to sugar that is then made into lactic acid through fermentation. A special process then turns the lactic acid into a polymer called polylactic acid (PLA). PLA is approved by the FDA for food and water contact. It can be made into a diverse range of products including bottles, utensils, cups, and plates.

The bottle will never decompose on the shelf or in your car. In the right conditions of heat, humidity, and naturally occurring organisms, the BIOTA bottle and label disappear within 80 days (they're working on the cap!)

Let's support this first step toward eliminating plastic bottles in our landfills. This product is available now at Publix. Learn more at www.biotaspringwater.com. We can make a difference, one bottle at a time.

Membership Renewals

Chapter memberships extend from October through December. Chapter members may use the coupon at right to renew membership for 2006. Please mark RENEW on your check.

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 _____
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Email _____

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March Meeting: Thursday, March 2nd, 7:00 pm @ Oxbow. Eric Draper, from Audubon of Florida, will present a program on Innovative Development.

**March Field Trip: (Rescheduled from February)
Saturday, March 4th; Wakodahatchee Wetlands in Boynton Beach**

Hart and Jewel Rufe will lead us on this wonderful 1/2 mile boardwalk that allows closeup views of wildlife. Purple Gallinules, Least Bitterns, Limpkin and many duck species are just a sampling of what can be seen at this lovely spot. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in front of the St. Lucie West Sears Essentials store, but as close to the street as possible. We will carpool from there. It will take about 1 3/4 hours go by Turnpike to reach our destination. We will probably spend the entire morning on the boardwalk.

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**St. Lucie Audubon
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Fort Pierce, FL 34979**



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