

Laughing Gull

The Newsletter of the St. Lucie Audubon Society



Volume 31 Issue #6

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

March 2007

Special Thanks

The board has decided each month we will acknowledge in our newsletter any special donations made to the Society. Thanks this month go to Mary Rudek, Jane Brooks, Harold Phillips, Liz Dunleavy, and Hart Rufe for donating to our Society instead of the Rufes' gas tank following the field trip to Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park to band Florida Grasshopper Sparrows.

Special thanks go to Hart for his generosity.



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. No special program is needed to open it, and you can print it out if you prefer to read it offline. Send your name and email address to flbird40@bellsouth.com.

President's Message

By Al Parmentier

Hello to all!

The great general meeting speakers just keep coming. I hope you are all enjoying them as much as I am. Thanks to Liz Dunleavy and Grace Stock for the work on our behalf.

I would be willing to bet that many people in Oswego, NY do not believe in global warming! Actually, it is global warming that has made the lakes warmer and created more lake-effect snow. Aren't we glad we are in Florida for the winter...

The Adams Ranch breakfast was a great event. Thanks to the article in *Luminaries*, we actually had to turn people away. Many thanks to Bud for taking the time to speak to the crowd about the ranch, its history, cattle breeding program, and other pertinent issues.

Want to have some fun on the water. Dana Muller with the Florida Fish & Wildlife spoil island project takes passengers to help count birds on the islands in the Indian River Lagoon. If you would like to participate, call Dana at 429-2995.

See you all at the March meeting.

Al Parmentier

Water Pollution

There has been a noticeable increase in the amount of pollution entering the St. Lucie River in the past several weeks, even though we have had very little rain.

If you notice a source of pollution that is not being contained and could be entering the St. Lucie River of the Indian River Lagoon and estuary please report it promptly. If you do not get a response after leaving a message, then be sure to report again the next day.

The number to call for concerns about poor quality water entering the River or Lagoon is:- Don Loving - South Florida Water Management District phone 772-223-2600 - ask for Mr. Loving and leave a message, you will receive a call back later.

Calendar of Events

March Meeting:

Thursday, March 1st at 7 p.m.

Florida Native Plants presented by Rita Sinn & Les Whidon, Master Gardeners.

March Field Trip:

Saturday, March 3rd

Sebastian Inlet SRA, (see back page for details).

Other events of interest

"Wake Up Call" Lecture Series
Saturday, March 3rd;

11 am @ Oxbow Eco-Center:

LIVING ROOFS

You want to put WHAT on my roof?!

That's the typical Floridian reaction to the up and coming roof design called Green Roofs. Also known as Living Roofs, this unique and environmentally friendly structural design is a relatively new commodity here in Florida, but the design has been used for decades in European nations. Community planners and homeowners welcome the green roof design because of its many benefits, including a long roof life, improved insulation and energy efficiency, improved water quality in surrounding watersheds, and aesthetics.

Join us for a glimpse into the future and find out what living roofs are all about. Presented by **Mike Hardin**, a research associate at the University of Central Florida, and co-founder of Stormwater Treatment Environments, Inc. which specializes in the design and construction of living roofs.

Meeting Place Location:

Oxbow Eco-Center

5400 NE St. James Dr., Port St. Lucie
(772) 785-5833

1.7 miles south of Midway Rd. and 1.8 miles north of Airoso Blvd on St. James Dr. (S. 25th St.)

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Environmentalist @ Home

by Gale Parmentier

Climate Code with Dr. Heidi Cullen on The Weather Channel

Here is a suggestion for those interested in exploring the many issues of the global warming debate. Each week The Weather Channel's climatologist, Dr. Heidi Cullen, gives a thirty-minute analysis of one issue. Her show is on Sunday evening at 5:00 pm and repeats the following Saturday evening at 5:00, 7:00, and 11:00.

Episodes to date have included the Everglades, the top ten green cities of the U.S.A., alternative fuels, auto design, building green homes, and changing weather patterns. The filming is good and the ideas presented well organized for those of us who are not scientists.

Birding Classes

March 23rd & 30th, Friday morning sessions from 9am - noon.

Field trips Saturdays following the class by St. Lucie Audubon.

Cost is only \$30.

Classes will be held at Oxbow Eco-Center 5400 St. James Drive, Port St. Lucie, FL 34983
For more details, call the Oxbow @ 785-5833.



Membership Renewals

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

GOPHER TORTOISE HOT LINE

888-404-3922

If you have reason to be concerned for the safety of Gopher Tortoise in St. Lucie County, if their habitat is soon to be developed, or there are Gopher Tortoise burrows on the site, obtain the correct address, the legal description if possible, and call the Gopher Tortoise HOTLINE 888-404-3922.

Remember the best place for Gopher Tortoise is on the site where they now live, relocation is a last resort to save lives. It is expensive to relocate Gopher Tortoise, about \$1,000 for each one.

If they are not safe, or may not be safe please call the hotline and refer to St. Lucie Audubon Gopher Tortoise Initiative.

HOT LINE 888-404-3922

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 a 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 _____

Feathered Friends

by Diane Goldberg

The February 3rd early morning field trip went to **Bluefield Ranch Natural Area** in Ft. Pierce. Steve Fousek, St. Lucie County Environment Resource Manager said it was n't early enough. Though you will see a long list of birds that we saw, if we had gotten there at 7 am instead of 8 am, we would have seen a lot more. Steve gave us a little history lesson. The park is 3,200 acres of scrubby pine Flatwoods, with a paleo hammock & wetlands. Besides having been a farm & cattle ranch, there was a native Indian village which was burned down in the 1960's. There is also evidence of illegal stills on the property.

While in park, we saw:

Ibis, Loggerhead Shrike, Red Shouldered Hawks, Wood Stork, Cattle Egret, Kingfisher, Dove, Black & Turkey Vultures, Meadow Lark, Yellow Rumped Warbler, Palm Warbler, Catbird, large flocks of Robins, Mockingbird, Cardinal, Flicker, Blue Jay, Red Belly Woodpecker, Phoebe, Great White Egret, a Caracara & Bald Eagle were spotted on the way into the park.

We also saw a very large Bald Eagles' nest, heard a Carolina Wren, & a White Eyed Vireo. We saw alligators, an otter, gopher tortoise burrows, & scat from raccoons, bobcats, a panther & wild hogs. The hogs have done a lot of damage to the grass, but the non-native grass is Bahia put in by the rancher. As damaging as it looks, their ripping through the grass has opened sandy areas that may become good Scrub Jay habitat as well as opening areas to native plants.

Some of the native plants we saw are:

Hat Pins, Coreopsis, Wax Myrtle, Sand Pine, Slash Pine, Virginia Creeper, Cabbage Palm, Pennywort, Long-leaf Violets, Pickerelweed, Rattlebox, Saw Palmetto, St John's Wort, Yellow Eyed Grass, Grape Vine, Prickly Pear, Lupine, Live Oak, Dog Fennel, Loblolly Bay, Day Flower

Of course there are some non-native invasives which will need constant attention.

The area is opened to horseback riding and mountain biking too. We all had a wonderful time and I suggest we make this trip again soon. Spring migration & new blooms would be a lively time.

EARTH DAY 2007

Saturday, April 21st * 10am - 3pm

Oxbow Eco-Center

Nature Hikes * Wildlife Shows * Reggae

Music * "Salute to Nature" Parade

FREE ADMISSION

5400 NE St. James Dr, PSL, , 772-785-5833

Conservation Corner

By Harold Phillips

Welcome to Conservation Corner for March. Strange things happen, but it will take a lot to beat this really interesting story. A few days ago Dotty and Hank Hull, our birding specialists, received a call of distress. At a several story building, co-incidentally known as the IRS building, located on US 1 in Port St. Lucie we were informed that about 20 birds had flown into the building and are lying dead on the ground nearby.

Who Dunit! The call comes late and after it is dark. There is nothing I can do this evening, I try to reach the person who reported the incident but is it too late! The next day we agree to go to the site, call the person on site first, and maybe get the Fish and Wildlife Commission to come and look at the situation.

On calling the person on site early the next morning they report that the birds are cedar waxwings and robins. He says they are now alive again, they appear to have been intoxicated having been feeding on Brazilian pepper berries and palmetto seeds. After a good night's sleep they had shaken off their drunken stupor and were really just "right as rain". There were still two or three in recovery the next morning, the others were gone. Perhaps they were feeding up for the next day and preparing for their long migration northwards. We would like to know has anyone seen a similar thing happen while bird watching? How about telling us about it at our next members meeting?

MIGRATING WHOOPING CRANES

The severe tornadoes and rain storms that ripped through central Florida have caused much damage and some deaths as we now know. Unfortunately it also killed all 18 of our migrating first year whooping cranes who had arrived in Florida in December, fledglings who had just successfully completed their first ultralight escorted migration. The cranes were being kept in an enclosure at the National Wildlife Refuge near Crystal River. An unexpected and unprecedented surge drew the tide of the Crystal River in and overwhelmed the birds. The cause of death was not immediately known.

By coincidence, members of the Operation Migration team were meeting in the area and going over the past year's progress and setting new goals for this year.

Joe Duff, senior pilot, said "we were all so excited we'd reached such a great milestone – we led all eighteen Cranes to Florida and we did not lose one".

After the initial shock "it just re-in-forced the support and determination to get this done. This has been our hardest migration, they were such good birds. It was our most difficult one to fund."

Please see our special appeal for your donations to help this very worthy cause – Operation Migration. For more information please see operationmigration.org/

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March 1st Meeting

Florida Native Plants presented by Rita Sinn & Les Whidon, Master Gardeners.

March 3rd Field Trip

We will start the morning at the home of Dale Simchick. We will meet with other interested local friends and see and hear how a beautiful parcel of habitat has recently been saved from development, by the persistence of Dale Simchick and local people. The property we will visit includes a flight area for a local colony of the Florida scrub jay, has wood storks, birds of prey, owls, and there are other interesting aspects about this habitat that must remain a secret for now.

Time permitting we plan to go from this area to the **Sebastian Inlet State Park** before returning home early to mid afternoon. Please bring your packed lunch. This is a first time visit for our Chapter or any other Chapter for that matter.

We will meet at our usual place at Home Depot in Ft. Pierce on Okeechobee Road in the Northeast section of the parking area and plan to leave promptly at 7.30am.

For those who wish to make their own way, take I-95 North past the Vero exit. Proceed to the Sebastian/Fellsmere exit and head east on County Road 512 for approx 3 miles. (You will go past a Publix, a Library, and a Winn Dixie) Make a right turn on Easy Street and continue to Collier Creek Estates. Continue one more mile, look for a tan residence with white pillars. Go to 766 South Easy Street, number is on the mail box. If lost call cell 321-3289. Dale Simchick will be waiting to meet us at her home at 8.30 am.

Bell South Pole is for the BIRDS

Our Port St. Lucie members John & Nancy Steinmentz have won their long standing contest with utility authority Bell South. In fact the birds have won too. Before the month of March reaches its midway point the screech owls, three of them, along with a pair of Pileated woodpeckers will be moving home a very short distance away, in fact about 20 feet in the same backyard where they were first raised. The 1957 Utility Pole is being passed to the owners in a "Bill of Sale" transaction at zero dollars. We will report in the next issue and maybe have photos of the day that the Steinmentz, the screech owls, and Pileated woodpeckers celebrate moving back into their old insect infested home at its new location and in the hands of its caring guardians. It is believed the screech owls and the Pileated woodpeckers have pole ownership in perpetuity, a much better deal than they had before with Bell South where they were facing eviction. Better still there is no mortgage payment involved with their new owners!

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