



# Laughing Gull

The Newsletter of the St. Lucie Audubon Society

VOLUME 34 • ISSUE IX • OCTOBER 2009

## President's Message

### GRAY HAIR IS NOT A PREREQUISITE FOR JOINING SLAS

The SLAS Board members and Chairpersons have been hard at work this summer. They have an exciting program planned for 2009-2010. Outstanding speakers covering a wide variety of topics, from the backyard, to the beach, to the Indian River, to the Everglades, to the Ocean, and from piping plovers, caracaras to backyard birds, have been scheduled for our general meetings. Monthly Field trips have been planned to Merritt Island, Green Cay, the Everglades, and more with boat trips on the Indian and St. Lucie River waterways. The Bird Education

classes will be evening classes in January.

Plan to attend our meetings and join our field trips. Gray hair is not a prerequisite to joining St. Lucie Audubon Society. We should encourage young people to become active members. Invite your friends and neighbors. Have them, along with you, attend our meetings and join our field trips

Do not forget to renew your membership.

Thank you for your support.

Dan Walma

## Calendar of Events

### OCTOBER FIELD TRIP : 10/3/09

Indian River boat cruise with Capt Chop Lege.

Meet at 9:45am outside the TIKI BAR, downtown Ft Pierce waterfront. The pontoon tour boat is now docked directly in front of the TIKI BAR ( not the same dock slip as last year ).

The Farmer's Market is held here the same day, so be sure to come early to give yourself enough time to find a parking space !

Seating is limited to 25, call Dorothy at 349-6025 to reserve a spot; leave your full name and phone #....OR you may sign-up with me in person at our 1st Audubon meeting on Oct 1. Priority goes to our SLAS members. Thank-you Capt Chop for freely offering to share your knowledge of the Indian River with us again !

### NOVEMBER FIELD TRIP: 11/14/09

STA 5 ( Stormwater Treatment Area # 5; Clewiston area)

The Hendry County Audubon Society, in partnership with the South Florida Water Management Dis-

trict (SFWMD), offers birding tours at the STA 5 near Clewiston. These STA's provide effective cleaning of water flowing into the Everglades by using plantlife to remove phosphorus from the water...and the large wetlands act as magnets for birds.

The tour is lead by a member of the Hendry County Audubon, and starts at 8:30 am at the gate to STA5.....so this is a trip for you EARLY BIRDS!! We will have to leave our meeting spot in Pt St Lucie by 6am SHARP to make it there in time (Clewiston is south of Lake Okeechobee)....details on the meeting spot will be in November newsletter. Carpooling is strongly encouraged for this trip. The STA 5 birding tour is by reservation only and there are 20 spots reserved on this tour for St Lucie Audubon....so contact Dorothy at 349-6025 and leave full name and phone # .....OR you may sign-up with me in person at our Audubon meetings. Since this is a limited # trip, priority goes to SLAS members.

Remember to check the November newsletter for more info.

October 1st Meeting: First meeting of the season, speaker George Jones, Indian River Keeper, 7 p.m.

November 5th Meeting: speaker Dr. Edith Widder, Exploring and Protecting Planet Ocean, 7 p.m.

Meeting Place: Oxbow Eco-Center • 5400 NE St. James Drive, Pt. St. Lucie, FL 34983

Located 1.5 miles south of Midway Road • 1.5 miles north of Airoso

[www.stlucieaudubon.org](http://www.stlucieaudubon.org)

## First Snowbirds Arriving

Sun, 09/06/2009 - 07:50 — Ecovoice Moderator  
<http://sites.google.com/site/donbrowne/news>

Bald Eagles - Florida's First Snowbirds

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has received reports of bald eagles returning to nesting territories throughout Florida the past few weeks.

This majestic bird that calls Florida home during its nesting season has been flying back to former nesting sites from Duval to Collier counties, although there are no reports of nesting activity yet. The official start of the nesting season is Oct. 1.

The FWC removed the bald eagle from the state's threatened species list in 2008 and at the same time implemented a bald eagle management plan with guidelines to help residents avoid causing a disturbance to nesting bald eagles. People should follow the management plan whenever activities or projects are being conducted within 660 feet of an eagle's nest when eagles are present. Bald eagles are

protected from disturbance by the Florida Administrative Code, as well as two federal laws: the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

The FWC is committed to conserving the bald eagle. All known nesting territories are surveyed annually by aircraft to monitor nesting activity and reproduction, according to Kirkpatrick.

In Florida, bald eagles may begin gathering materials for nests in late September or early October. They begin laying eggs as early as October and as late as April, with incubation lasting approximately 35 days. Once hatched, the fledglings begin flying from the nest at 11 weeks, but stay with their parents an additional four to 11 weeks.

For more information on bald eagles and a copy of the management plan, go to [MyFWC.com/Eagle](http://MyFWC.com/Eagle). If you suspect there is a potential wildlife violation occurring, call the Wildlife Alert Hotline at 888-404-FWCC (3922).

### \*\*\* SPONSORS WANTED \*\*\*

St. Lucie County has a new policy of charging Non-Profits for use of County facilities.

Our cost is \$45.00 per month payable in advance. We are looking for sponsors to underwrite the cost of using Oxbow-Eco-Center.

In return we will acknowledge individual or company names in our Newsletter several times during the ensuing year. If you are interested in sponsoring SLA's ongoing program please send checks to :

**ST. LUCIE AUDUBON,  
 P.O. BOX 12474,  
 FORT PIERCE, FL 34979**

**Thanks to the Following Sponsors  
 John and Nettie Brolman  
 Deena and Dana Wade - "River Lilly"**

### [www.stlucieaudubon.org](http://www.stlucieaudubon.org)

#### ST.LUCIE AUDUBON SOCIETY 2009 OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

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## Conservation Corner

Submitted by Ed Bowes

On Wednesday, September 9, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) announced the agency had accepted a petition to list the gopher tortoise as threatened in the eastern portion of its range. FWS defines threatened species as any species which is likely to become an endangered species within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range. The gopher tortoise has been listed as threatened in the western portion of its range (western Alabama to southeaster Louisiana) since 1987. Accepting the petition has triggered a status review of the gopher tortoise by the FWS. According to the FWS Web site, the agency "is soliciting scientific and commercial data and other information regarding the status of and threats facing the gopher tortoise throughout all of its range." ([www.fws.gov/northflorida/GopherTortoise](http://www.fws.gov/northflorida/GopherTortoise)) This development is of interest to St. Lucie Audubon members because of previous gopher tortoise rescue activities by the chapter.

The eastern portion of the gopher tortoise's range includes Alabama east of the Mobile River, Georgia, Florida, and southeastern South Carolina. Florida contains the largest portion of the total range of the species, and quite possibly the largest remaining population of gopher tortoises. The FWS accepted the following reasons to review gopher tortoise status:

- Habitat destruction—land modification for urban development has increased by 614% in the eastern portion of the gopher tortoise's range while natural pine habitat (pine uplands) has decreased by 61%. Habitat degradation fragments tortoise populations and forces them to forage further for food.
- Disease or predation—the number of gopher tortoises reported as killed by upper respiratory tract disease has risen since 1995. Higher disease burden reduces the ability of gopher tortoises to reproduce. High nest predation in north Florida and south Georgia resulted in the destruction of 80% of gopher tortoise nests and a hatchling mortality rate of 94.2%.
- The species slow sexual maturation and low reproductive rate—female gopher tortoises take 9 to 21 years to mature sexually and lay only one clutch per year. This was one reason the western gopher tortoise population was listed as threatened in 1987.

The rationale for listing the gopher tortoise as threatened is compelling and chilling. Humans have

had a dramatic impact on the land in Florida since 1987, yet developers want growth rules loosened to permit more building on gopher tortoise habitat. This year, the Florida legislature passed Senate Bill 360, which removed concurrency requirements for increased traffic from development and revised the definition of "existing urban service area" to permit more sprawl. St. Lucie County has joined other Florida counties in suing the State of Florida for Senate Bill 360 as an unfunded mandate that voids local control of growth. Adding the gopher tortoise as a threatened species to this mix will make developers very unhappy.

As a concerned citizen and resident of Florida, be sure to follow the FWS review of the gopher tortoise's status and legislative reaction to the probable listing of the tortoise as a threatened species. The fallout will affect growth management rules throughout Florida

## Membership Application

A one-year chapter membership extends from January to January. You may use the coupon below to begin or renew your membership.

SLAS is now offering a Chapter-only annual membership for those who want to financially support their local chapter. The following dues options apply:

- Individual: \$20 per year**
- Family: \$25 per year**  
(for 2 or more people in same household)
- Sponsor: \$50 per year**
- Patron: \$100 per year**
- Lifetime: \$500**

Each local membership includes a subscription to the monthly newsletter "The Laughing Gull". You may receive "The Laughing Gull" via standard mail or electronically via email. Please indicate your preference below.

**Please make checks payable to and send to:**

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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

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**New membership:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Renewal:** \_\_\_\_\_

Please send my "Laughing Gull" by:

**Email** \_\_\_\_\_ or **Standard mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Thanks for your support.*

# Feathered Friends

Submitted by Ruth Neese

In Florida, we often see Barn Swallows swooping over groves, fields, roadways, ponds, and canals, hunting flying insects.

Unfortunately, Barn Swallows do not nest in this part of Florida. We only see them during migration in fall and spring as they travel between wintering and breeding grounds. However, Barn Swallows do nest in the Florida Panhandle.

As an early harbinger of fall migration, Barn Swallows signal the flood of birds to come! When I see swallows, I know the warblers and raptors cannot be far behind. Which warbler is the first to appear in St. Lucie County during fall migration? In honor of the start of a new season for St. Lucie Audubon, I am offering a little contest. The first three people to email the answer to the question--what is the first warbler to be seen in St. Lucie County during fall migration--will be treated to a "backstage tour" of the Treasure Coast Wildlife Center. Send your answers to eddie\_ruth@msn.com. Winners will be announced at the November meeting.

The first sign of fall migration appeared in August—the Barn Swallows were here! Florida is a refueling point before these birds continue to Central and South America. Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) winter as far south as Tierra del Fuego, Argentina. Almost everyone on Earth has seen a Barn Swallow since they are the most widely distributed and abundant swallows in the world. Farmers favor these birds because they eat many pest insects and will nest in agricultural structures, which is how they got their name.

Barn Swallows are distinguishable by their iridescent dark blue upper feathers, buffy to rusty-red throat and chest, and white-spotted deeply forked tails. Males and females are similar in color while juveniles have shorter tails and cream-colored breast and belly. The average lifespan in the wild is 6-8 years; males tend to live longer than females. Like all other swallows, Barn Swallows hunt insects and eat on the wing.

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