

Laughing Gull

The Newsletter of the St. Lucie Audubon Society

Volume 37

Number 1

October, 2011



The Ovenbird

President's Message

Submitted by Ruth Neese

The "dog days" are upon us. Those of you who live in Florida year-round know that August, September, and early October are the hottest parts of the summer. As we swelter in heat indexes over 100-degrees and fret about hurricanes, our feathered friends have begun their annual southward migration.

Why would birds fly south, in this heat? Birds have seasonal and physiological triggers that prompt the start of migration, and fall migration triggers are not well understood. Some warblers start



The Semi-palmated Plover

south as early as July while certain raptors remain in northern climes until cold or lack of food drives them south. Humans are left to puzzle and enjoy the prolonged spectacle of fall migration. Warblers have already arrived here, with shorebirds and swallows soon to follow.

So, if you brave the heat, look for Black-and-white Warblers, Prairie Warblers, Ovenbirds, Louisiana Waterthrushes, American Redstarts, Barn Swallows, Semipalmated Plover, American Avocets, and other beauties. Also remember our Swallow-tailed Kites will leave for Brazil soon, so watch for kites massing prior to flying south. Above all, get out, look up, and enjoy the show!



The Prairie Warbler

Feathered Friends

Submitted by Ruth Neese

I was thrilled to spot my first American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) in late afternoon August 19! It was a female kestrel and the sighting marked the earliest I have ever seen a kestrel in my yard.

Most kestrels seen in St. Lucie County are migratory birds traveling from Canada and the Northern United States to wintering grounds in the southern U.S. and Mexico.

American Kestrels are the smallest falcon in North America, living and breeding from Alaska, through Canada and the United States, down into Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean.

This includes Florida, where the birds breed in Central Florida along the Lake Wales ridge. I once saw a breeding pair nesting in a dead tree at Bok Tower Gardens in Lake Wales. American Kestrel populations have been increasing recently, and are listed as a "species of least concern" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.

American Kestrels are one of the few sexually color dimorphic raptors, meaning males and females have different plumage colors. Male kestrels have slate blue-gray secondary wing feathers, a rufous tail with a black subterminal band, and black banding on the underside of the wings.

Females are larger than males and have rufous coloration on the wings, backs, and tails.

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Male American Kestrel

Conservation Corner

Submitted by Ed Bowes

You may recall there was an article in the February 2011 *Laughing Gull* describing the proposed creation of the Everglades Headwaters NWR & Conservation Area. On September 7, 2011, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) released a draft proposal for the 50,000-acre national wildlife refuge.

The additional 100,000 acres are to be added through conservation easements on farmland and ranches.

This is a very ambitious proposal that seeks to preserve the largest remaining grassland and savanna landscape in eastern North America through a partnership with federal,



state, and local governments; state and local conservation organizations; and private landowners.

Surprisingly, the proposal has faced very vocal opposition from people who are opposed to what they termed “federal sprawl.”

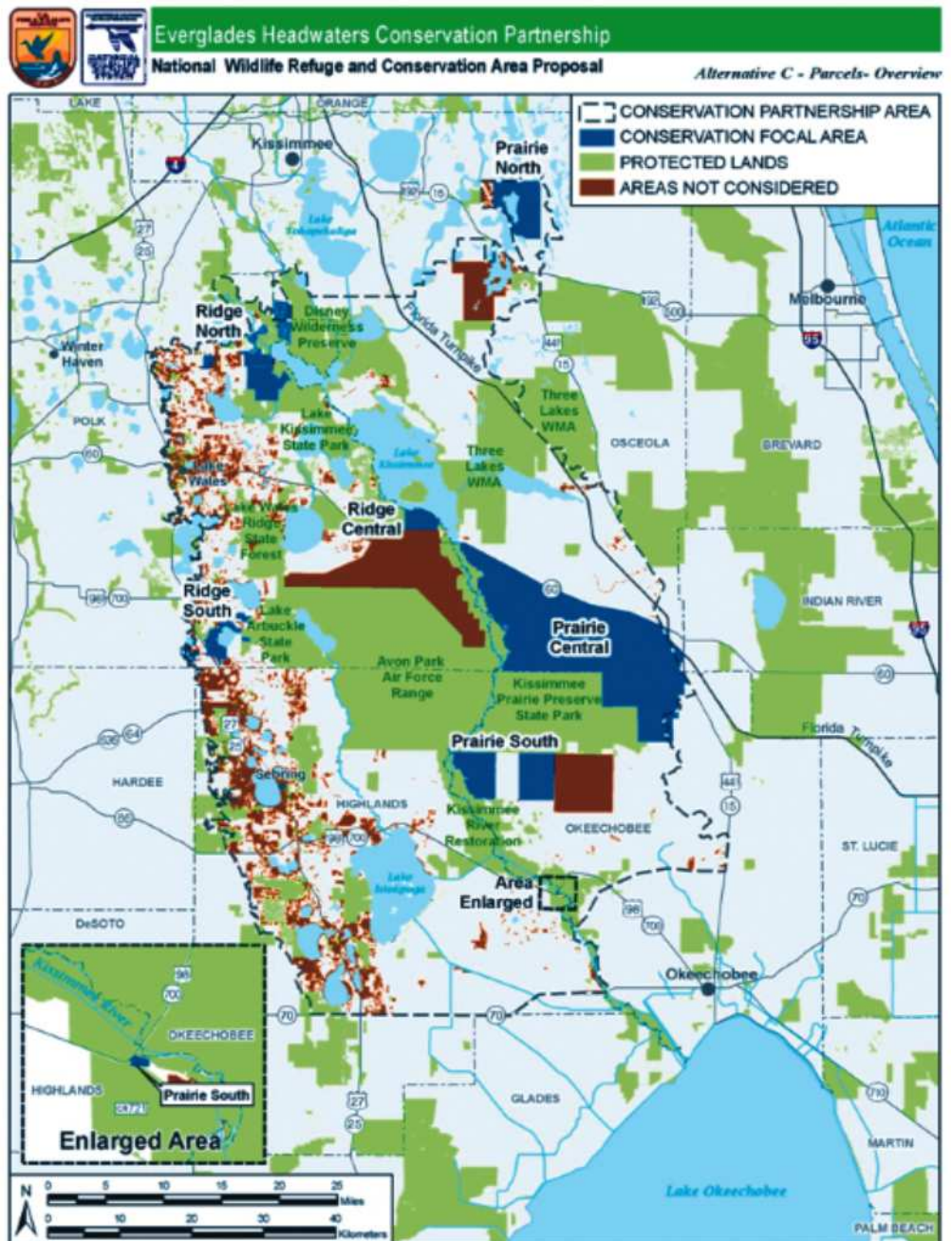
As reported in the *St. Petersburg Times*, the most vocal opponents to the proposal are concerned about the loss of access for hunting, fishing, and use of all-terrain vehicles and airboats.

This would indeed happen within the 50,000-acre wildlife refuge.

However, landowners with conservation easements would be permitted to allow some of these activities within limits negotiated with the FWS.

The goal is to work with willing landowners to establish usage plans for conservation easements.

The draft proposal is available online at <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/evergladesheadwaters/> Public comment on the draft proposal closes on October 24, 2011. The FWS is accepting written comments on the draft via email, fax, or written letter. Please consider lending your support to this effort to conserve the natural resources of and the rural way of life in the Kissimmee River Valley.



U.S. Nightjar Survey

The Center for Conservation Biology (CCB) of the College of William & Mary sponsors a nightjar survey every spring.

The CCB uses citizen volunteers to count how many nighthawks are heard along a 10-mile route. Surveys must be conducted at night near the full moon in May or June.

Birds included in the survey are: Common Nighthawk, Chuck-will's-widow, Whip-poor-will, Mexican Whip-poor-will, Buff-collared Nightjar, Lesser Nighthawk, Antillean Nighthawk, Common Poorwill, and Common Pauraque.

In St. Lucie Co., one would expect to hear Chuck-will's-widows, Common Nighthawks, and rarely, Antillean Nighthawks.

Ed Bowes, Ruth Neese, And Terri Brown conducted a nightjar survey on May 19, 2011 along Glades Cut-off and the C-24 Canal Roads.



The Common Nighthawk

In addition to multitudes of frogs, mosquitos, and trucks, the trio counted 12 Common Nighthawks and 8 Chuck-will's-widows. The data they reported to the CCB will be used to track nightjar populations.

Feathered Friends

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Females' tails have multiple dark brown or black bands instead of the one band present in males.

As a small raptor, American Kestrels hunt small prey. They forage for grasshoppers, dragonflies, mice, voles, and lizards from perches on power lines, dead trees, or roadside signs.

Wintering kestrels will also hunt small birds such as sparrows, warblers, and wrens. It is common to see kestrels perched with Mourning Doves on power lines; the kestrels are identifiable by their "no neck" look in silhouette.

Recent research using kestrel DNA indicates American Kestrels are not genetically related to the European Common Kestrel and others in that family.

Instead, the American Kestrel appears most closely related to the Peregrine and Aplomado Falcons, having genetically diverged from European kestrels during the Ice Ages. So this winter, look up for a small, Ice Age falcon hunting grasshoppers from roadside perches!

Membership Renewal

Now that our new season of birding has started, lets get off on the right foot and renew our chapter membership dues as soon as possible.

The leadership of our chapter has some great fieldtrips and speakers lined up for this coming season, but we need your financial support to make it a success.

Twenty dollars renews your individual membership. \$25 renews your family membership.

You can renew your membership in person at our October meeting by seeing Jay Wise, treasurer for our chapter.

If you prefer, you may utilize the membership renewal form that is included in this edition of the Laughing Gull and mail your membership renewal in.

Either way, we sincerely appreciate your continued support for the coming year.



Female American Kestrel

Photos courtesy of Amy Marques

**St Lucie Audubon Society
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A Loggerhead Shrike at Savannas Preserve State Park

Membership Application

A one-year chapter membership extends from January to January. You may use this membership application form 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 Membership: \$ 20.00 per year
Family Membership: \$ 25.00 per year
(for 2 or more persons in the same household)
Sponsor - \$ 50.00 per year
Patron - \$100.00 per year
Lifetime Membership - \$500.00

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 _____

**October 8th Field Trip -
Indian River Cruise with Capt. Chope Lege**

Our 1st trip of the year with Capt Chop Lege is becoming a tradition! Join us for a beautiful and informative boat trip on the Indian River and learn not only about the birds in the area, but environmental projects going on that will hopefully provide nesting habitats for bird.

Capt Chop has a lot of info to share on that ! Join us no later than 9:45 am ; boat departs at 10:00am.....meet near the Tiki Bar at the Fort Pierce Marina (the tour boat is parked right in front on the Tike bar).Parking can be tight due to the Farmer's Market, so be sure to give yourself enough time. The trip is usually 1 ½ to 2 hours. You must call Dorothy at 772-349-6025 to reserve a spot....leave a message including a # to call you back at.

**Summer Birding
Took Us Out of State**

Submitted by John Nelson

There aren't too many birders that venture outdoors in Florida's summer heat and humidity. But other parts of the country offer spectacular opportunities for a nice birding vacation.

At the beginning of July we traveled to Amarillo, Texas. The drought is even worse than we imagined, yet



A Golden-Fronted Woodpecker drinks from a manmade watering hole in Palo Duro Canyon, Texas

in this extremely dry and hot climate (100 degrees plus), life was thriving.

Deep inside Palo Duro Canyon, the state park system constructed a bird blind near a watering hole.

Wild Turkeys, Northern Cardinals, Roadrunners, and an assortment of song birds took turns quenching their thirst.

Of special interest, a Golden-Fronted Woodpecker spent a lot of time in front of my video camera.

A month later, Ernie (my wife) and I traveled to Washington state to visit my mother. True to form, we loaded her in the car and made a birder out of her.

We spent a week in the North Cascades National Park, Olympic National Park, and the San Juan Islands.

The mountains of the North Cascades were spectacular, as Bald Eagles soared high above the snow covered peaks.

In the high alpine meadows of Olympic National Park, Spruce Grouse walked right up to me to



Near Washington Pass in the North Cascades National Park of Washington State.

smile for my camera, while the Grizzly Bears in the North Cascades were thankfully a bit more standoffish.

Wherever your vacation destinations might take you, the local bird population is always there for your enjoyment.



A Spruce Grouse walked up my video camera, sat down, then calmly allowed me to video tape it from 3 feet away.

Program Speakers Highlight a New Season of Birding

This year's schedule of program speakers and field trip outings is sure to provide us all with many great opportunities. Here is the complete meeting schedule for the coming year. All meetings are scheduled for the Ox-Box Eco-Center.

October 6th - Steve Fousek - St. Lucie County Parks

November 2nd - AnnMarie Slattery-Loveridge - Plantings that Bring Birds

December 1st - David Simpson - The Birds of St. Lucie County

January 5th - Sam Fried - Kansas - Unbelievable!

February 2nd - Adam Grayson - The Art of Falconing

March 1st - Dr. Grant Gilmore - "40 years of research in the Indian River Lagoon; A Retrospective View"

April 8th - Julie Wraithmell, Director of Endangered Species, Audubon of Florida - Discussion of Endangered Species

May 3rd - Cameron Jaggard - The Gulf Longline Campaign in the Gulf of Mexico



Next Meeting

October 6, 2011

7:00 PM

Steve Fousek - St. Lucie County Parks

Meeting Place: Oxbow Eco-Center - 5400 NE St. James Drive

Port St. Lucie, FL 34983

Located 1.5 Miles south of Midway Road - 1.5 miles north of Airoso

Upcoming Events

October 8th - Field Trip

Indian River Boat Tour with Captain Chop Lege

November 2nd - General Meeting

AnneMarie Slattery-Loveridge - Plantings that Bring Birds

November 5th - Field Trip

Teague Hammock Preserve, Fort Pierce

December 1st - General Meeting

David Simpson - The birds of St. Lucie County

December 3rd - Field Trip

Vero Beach Waste Management Wetlands

Laughing Gull

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

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No special program is needed to open it, and you can print it out if you prefer to read it offline.

To sign up, send your name and email address to: Eddie_ruth@msn.com