



LAUGHING GULL

President's Message

From Ed Bowes



The Florida State Legislature convenes March 5, 2013. That means legislative staff and committees are already reviewing bills for the upcoming session. Laws and regulations coming out of Tallahassee for the past two years have not been kind to Florida's wild lands or native flora and fauna.

Please keep your eyes and ears open for proposed changes that open conservation land to development or cut funding for environmental protection programs. Let your representatives hear your voice in support of preserving wild Florida!

IMPORTANT DATES

Bird Counts



Christmas Bird Count: Completed! And a big "thank you" to all participants!

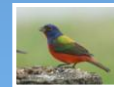


Bird-A-Thon: April 6 or 7, 2013. You have the option of counting one of those days. More details later.

Special Events



Adams Ranch Breakfast: NEW DATE February 16, 2013. Cost \$25 per person. Register with Maryellen 772-359-5416



Painted Bunting Trip: March 2, 2013. Cost \$10 per person. Register with Maryellen 772-359-5416.

"The Big Year" January 3, 2013

Sandy Komito is the birder that was the inspiration for the book and the movie titled "The Big Year." In 1998, he secured the American Birding Association all-time record for number of bird species seen in one year—an incredible 748! Come and hear Sandy speak about his birding experiences.



Feathered Friends by Ruth Neese

December has brought amazing reports of alcid birds off Florida's coasts that should not be here—Razorbills. Razorbills (*Alca torda*) are large auks normally found in the North Atlantic. Their winter range does not extend south of the waters off North Carolina, yet Razorbills have been sighted near St. Augustine, Fort Pierce, and Pensacola! BRDBRAIN, the Florida Rare Bird Alert forum, has been packed with reports of sightings since just after Hurricane Sandy.

The Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) attributes these sightings to birds that were

blown away from their normal feeding grounds. This is problematic for Razorbills for two reasons. First, the birds dive for cold water krill and small fish, something lacking in our warm waters. Second, the lack of normal food can weaken the birds and take a toll on their health. Young birds could be unable to find their way back to northern waters.

FWC has requested that all dead Razorbills be reported to their surveillance database at <http://legacy.myfwc.com/bird/default.asp> and that ill or injured birds be taken to a wildlife rehabilitator.



Razorbill in non-breeding plumage

Photo by Rick Greenspun

Field Trip – Saturday January 5 to Merritt Island NWR



Northern Pintails photographed at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge.

Join us for our annual trip to Merritt Island NWR. Hart and Jewel Rufe will be our leaders! We will meet at the Home Depot parking lot on Okeechobee Rd in Ft Pierce; be there by 6:20 AM for a 6:30 AM sharp departure. Bring food and drinks and be prepared for a great day of birding! Details provided on January 3.

I need the name and phone # of each of you that are coming, in case there are any last minute changes due to weather, etc. Please leave a message on my phone (Dorothy 772-349-6025) with your name and phone #, or sign up at our Jan 3rd meeting.



Conservation Corner: Delisting – A Double-Edged Sword

By Ruth Neese

As reported in the December 19, 2012 edition of the *Palm Beach Post*, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) has proposed removing the Wood Stork from the federal endangered species list and reclassifying the bird as “threatened.” The Florida Home Builders Association submitted a petition to the USFWS to reclassify the Wood Stork in 2009. This petition was prompted by a USFWS report showing a dramatic increase in stork numbers outside of Florida. Wood Storks can now be found breeding successfully in Georgia and South Carolina and may be expanding their range into North Carolina and Mississippi.

Wood Storks were placed on the endangered species list in 1984 when there were only 2500 nesting pairs in Florida, down from 20,000 in the early 20th Century. In 2011, the USFWS reported 5000 nesting pairs in Florida. Since 2000, the number of nesting

pairs in the southeastern U.S. has ranged from 7000 to 9000. This is just short of the 10,000 nests a year needed to delist the Wood Stork; that is, remove the bird from the endangered species list. Currently, the Wood Stork is Florida’s only federally listed wading bird.

While the USFWS is hailing the increased numbers as a conservation success, Florida environmentalists are saying it is too soon to delist Wood Storks. They are concerned about the birds’ dramatic shift in range and the potential explosion in development that could result from delisting. Wood Storks have largely abandoned the Everglades due to development pressures that changed water levels and dried out wetlands. Removing Wood Storks from the endangered species list would permit development

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near wetlands that are currently protected by the presence of the storks. Development that increases water runoff or decreases water quality adversely affects the storks' food supply, especially during the dry season.

The storks require low water levels during breeding season to ensure an adequate supply of food for their chicks. The birds are inefficient hunters, dependent upon blind probing for fish in pools of water less than 18 inches deep. Anything that raises water levels or decreases the number of fish means breeding adults cannot find enough food for their chicks, resulting in nest abandonment. Environmentalists state that Wood Stork numbers are still too precarious to remove them from the endangered species list, especially with developers poised to take immediate advantage of delisting.

The USFWS currently states that all federal Wood Stork conservation and protection measures would remain in force if the birds were delisted. However, *something* must change or the Florida Homebuilders' Association would not have filed the reclassification petition. This development bears watching.

Sponsors Wanted!

St. Lucie County has a policy of charging non-profits for the use of county facilities.

Our cost is **\$45 dollars a month**, payable in advance. We are looking for sponsors to underwrite the cost of our monthly meetings at the 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 St. Lucie Audubon's monthly programs, please send checks to:

St. Lucie Audubon Society

PO Box 12474

Ft. Pierce, FL 34979

**We would like to thank
our generous meeting
sponsors:**

Bruce & Susan Whittmore

George & Kristial Comins

**River Lily Cruises (Dana &
Deena Wade)**

Sam Fried & Gale Donnelly

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contacted by email at
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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,
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Thanks for your support.

Remember!

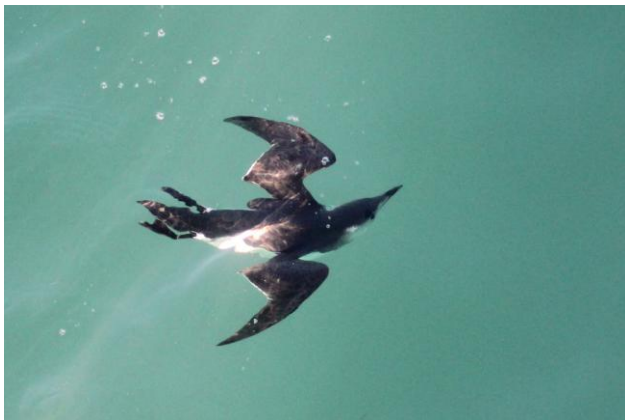
A St. Lucie County-specific bird checklist is available on our chapter Web site. The birds are listed in taxonomic order and the list indicates when you are most likely to see a particular bird in St. Lucie Co.

Visit
<http://stlucieaudubon.org> to download the list. It's free!



December 8 field trip to the Indrio Savannahs Preserve led by Sam Fried.

More Razorbill photos, courtesy of BRDBRAIN contributor, Larry Goodman. The photos were taken at the fishing pier on Pensacola Beach December 18, 2012.



This link goes to a YouTube video of a Razorbill fishing underwater in the Gulf of Mexico!

http://youtu.be/cEthm_8SPuM

The December 8 field trip was a success, as reported here. Eighteen people attended our trip to Indrio Savannahs on a sunny and mild Saturday morning. Sam Fried led the trip, and as he always does, he shared much bird identification knowledge with the group.

The highlight of the trip was, of course, the Florida Scrub-Jay. We were greeted by a group of 9 of them who spotted us when we were about 5 minutes into our walk. They flew over to us and followed us for a good part of our walk! The group identified 36 species while at the Indrio Savannahs Preserve.

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|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1—Mottled Duck | 19—Blue Jay |
| 2—Wood Duck | 20—Florida Scrub Jay |
| 3—Anhinga | 21—Tree Swallow |
| 4—Little Blue Heron | 22—Carolina Wren |
| 5—Great Egret | 23—Blue-gray Gnatcatcher |
| 6—White Ibis | 24—American Robin |
| 7—Black Vulture | 25—Gray Catbird |
| 8—Osprey | 26—Northern Mockingbird |
| 9—Bald Eagle | 27—Brown Thrasher |
| 10—American Kestrel | 28—Yellow-rumped Warbler |
| 11—Sandhill Crane | 29—Prairie Warbler |
| 12—Killdeer | 30—Pine Warbler |
| 13—Common Ground-Dove | 31—Palm Warbler |
| 14—Ruby-throated Hummingbird | 32—Eastern Towhee |
| 15—Red-bellied Woodpecker | 33—Northern Cardinal |
| 16—Northern Flicker | 34—Painted Bunting |
| 17—Eastern Phoebe | 35—Boat-tailed Grackle |
| 18—White-eyed Vireo | 36—American Goldfinch |

A friend of Sam Fried, Paul York, sent a link to field trip photos on Picasa. He also gave permission to re-use the images. There are some stunning bird photos and photos of the group.

<https://picasaweb.google.com/108859111287450905970/Dec072012IndrioSavannahsPreserve>

Coming Attractions: February Field Trips & Speaker

**February Field Trip #1: Saturday,
February 9, 2013 to Green Cay
Wetlands in Palm Beach County**

This field trip will be led by Hart and Jewel Rufe. Both are excellent birders, and Hart publishes a column on our Web page titled *The Hart Beat*.

**February Field Trip #2: Saturday
February 16 to Ft. Pierce Inlet
State Park**

This field trip is designed for bird and nature photographers and will be led by avid photographer John Nelson. More details will be

available at the January meeting. Call Dorothy to register—772-349-6025.

**February Speaker: Thursday,
February 7 at 7 PM at the
Oxbow Eco-Center**

Marty Baum, the new Indian Riverkeeper, will be speaking about the importance of clean water and mangrove habitat for our lagoon.

“The Indian River Lagoon”



Mark your calendars!

Help our chapter save printing and mailing costs by signing-up for the email newsletter. The newsletter can then be printed out if you prefer to read it offline. To request the email version, send your name and email address to eddie_ruth@msn.com

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St. Lucie Audubon Society PO Box12474
Fort Pierce, FL 34979