



LAUGHING GULL

President's Message

From Ed Bowes



Spring migration has started! Swallowed-tailed Kites have already been sighted on Florida's west coast and male American Goldfinches are developing their yellow summer colors. Soon our winter visitors will be leaving

us for their breeding grounds. Take advantage of birding before they are gone. Our annual Bird-A-Thon is scheduled for April 6 and 7, so get out and enjoy the variety of birding in St. Lucie County!

IMPORTANT DATES

Bird Counts



Christmas Bird Count: National Audubon Society is finalizing the data.

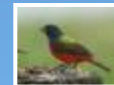


Bird-A-Thon: April 6 or 7, 2013. You have the option of counting one of those days. Register via email to SLABirdathon@gmail.com

Special Events



New! Photographing Wildlife Workshop: March 9, 9 AM - Noon and 1 - 4 PM. Register with John 772-485-8129



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

Earth Hour – Conservation Corner by Ruth Neese

It's almost time for Earth Hour! What is Earth Hour? It is a global movement focused on uniting people to share the opportunities and challenges of creating a sustainable world.

Earth Hour started in 2007 in Sydney, Australia when 2.2 million individuals and 2000 businesses turned off

their lights for one hour. In 2012, more than 7001 cities in 152 countries participated in Earth hour.

This year, Earth Hour takes place on March 23 in your time zone from 8:30 to 9:30 PM. Please, turn off your lights for the Earth March 23! Visit www.earthhour.org for more details.



There are dozens of tools and ideas available at www.earthhour.org and the organization has a YouTube channel. This link takes you to the official video for 2013: <http://youtu.be/2UywrjnOaUE>

Earth Hour cites the World Wildlife Federation's *Living Planet Report* as evidence that major change is needed in how humans treat our planet. The key finding of the *Living Planet Report* was that humanity's demands exceed the planet's capacity to sustain life. The report also contains the following disturbing statistics:

- Biodiversity has declined globally approximately 30% between 1970 and 2008
- Biodiversity has declined 60% in the tropical regions during the same time period
- Demand on natural resources has doubled since 1966
- "Business as usual" projections indicate that we will need the equivalent of **two** Planet Earth's to meet our demands by 2030
- "Business as usual" is not sustainable.

The full text of the *Living Planet Report* is available here:

http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/all_publications/living_planet_report/

The United Nations and the World Health Organization are working toward sustainable development goals globally. This effort sprang from the *Rio Declaration* of 1992 (available here:

<http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?documentid=78&articleid=1163>). These global organizations are now focused on Rio+20 initiatives, an area where the United States lags behind other countries. You can find more information on Rio+20 at: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org>

Feathered Friends by Ruth Neese

How many names does one bird need? One bird in our area has had many—Audubon’s Crested Caracara, Crested Caracara, Mexican Eagle, and now Northern Caracara! The name seems to depend upon the publication date of your bird guide. By any name, the Northern Caracara (*Caracara cheriway*) is a fascinating bird.

Often mistaken as a “buzzard” because it scavenges carrion, the caracara is listed as a member of the falcon family. Unlike swift, sleek falcons, caracara fly more like hawks and pursue a much wider variety of prey. The birds will prey on anything from insects to feral piglets, and

they are not above raiding dumpsters.

Caracaras are considered threatened in Florida, but are plentiful in their range south of here. South Florida breeding territories are saturated, and large groups of “floaters” (unmated birds) travel from central Florida to Dade County in roving bands. The floaters bide their time until one member of a mated pair dies, then a floater moves in!

These birds are fairly common in western St. Lucie County. Be sure to look for them!



Adult Northern Caracara in flight

Field Trip – Saturday March 9, West Regional Wastewater Treatment Facility Wetland



Marsh Wren – Photo taken at the West Regional Wastewater Treatment Facility Wetland

Dr. Dan Walma, our past Audubon President and a Certified Florida Master Naturalist, will be our leader to this popular wetland just off I-95 in Vero Beach. We will be walking the impoundments around the wetlands, so wear proper footwear.

We will meet at the Home Depot parking lot on Okeechobee Rd in Fort Pierce between 7:30-7:45 AM and from there we will drive to the wetlands. We leave the wetlands by late morning. Any questions, call Dorothy at 772-349-6025.



March Speaker: James Currie – “Exploring Birds”

March 7, 2013 at 7 PM at the Kight Center of
Indian River State College

“A bit of a rock star” was a phrase used to describe James Currie in an article from the *Palm Beach Post* in 2012. James has two TV shows about birding—“Nikon Birding Adventures” on the Pursuit Channel and “Aerial Assassins” on the Nat Geo Wild Channel. He also travels the world as a speaker and avid birder who will go to any lengths to spot a bird.

He describes the focus of his work as changing the perception of birding from a passive activity to an exciting adventure. He wants to eliminate the assumption that “bird-watching is for people who watch sparrows at bird feeders.” His replacement is a view of birding as an avenue of discovery, a means of learning about the wonders in the natural world.

A native of South Africa, James grew up on Cape Town’s Table Mountain, where his parents ran the surrounding park’s restaurant. He began birding at 7

or 8 years of age, wandering in the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens. The trigger for his fascination with birds was watching a Black Eagle grab a Rock Hyrax right in front of him.

He holds a Bachelors degree in African languages and speaks Zulu, Xhosa, and Afrikaans. His graduate work earned him a Masters of Science in Environmental Management. He also served as the managing director of the Africa Foundation until 2007. The opportunity to start filming Birding Adventures lured him from Africa in 2007 to Palm Beach County, where he currently live with his family.

His enthusiasm for birds and birding has been described as “contagious,” and we hope you will join us to “catch” some of his expertise!

Adams Ranch Breakfast Report by John Imperato

As always, the Audubon "Taste of Old Florida" was an overwhelming success as measured by the comments of our 80 participants. The bus tour of the ranch was driven and expertly narrated by Mike Adams. The breakfast was made by Jane Rowley to the delight of all who ate it. During our tours, we saw gators, deer, cattle, egrets, a Caracara, herons, vultures, a Bald Eagle and other interesting wild life specimens.

During the course of the morning, we were treated to a personal visit by our host Bud Adams. He made everyone feel welcome and gave a computer-based slide show presentation highlighting the features and attributes of the Ranch.

He also asked for support from the community to get an easement for the Ranch so that it could remain intact and not be adversely impacted by estate taxes that might result in the sale of portions of the Ranch. I truly hope that some accommodation can be made to preserve this environmental and ecological treasure.



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:

Flights of Fancy Adventures

Hank Hull

ST. LUCIE AUDUBON BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Board members may be contacted by email at stlucieaudubon@gmail.com

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: _____

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E-mail: _____

New membership: _____ **Renewal:** _____

Please send my "Laughing Gull" by:
Email _____ or **Standard mail:** _____

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!

The February field trip to Green Cay and the Wakodahatchee Wetlands was enjoyed by all who attended. A rare (for Florida) bird was sighted—a La Sagra's Flycatcher! A fine assortment of wading birds was seen, including the Great Blue Heron to the right with the interesting arrangement of breeding plumes.

A total of 60 species were sighted, including ducks, raptors, warblers, and corvids. Our group always seems to attract more followers as we proceed around the boardwalk, and we try to use the occasion as a teaching and information spreading opportunity.

See the full trip report on our Web site at
<http://stlucieaudubon.org>



One of our members, Hart Rufe, writes a column for our Web site called “The Hart Beat.” His February 13, 2013 column generated quite a bit of feedback for him, so I wanted to feature it here. For all of Hart’s fascinating columns, please visit <http://stlucieaudubon.org>

Calling Birds by Hart Rufe

The Screech Owl kept calling incessantly. Little birds seemed to be coming from all over, attracted to the call. What’s going on? First of all, it’s strange that the owl is calling in the middle of the day like this, and aren’t all those little birds supposed to be afraid of owls? Let’s find the owl. There it is. It’s not an owl at all; it’s a man playing a tape recording of the owl’s call. But look at all the little birds, homing in on the owl’s call, obviously searching for the bird! And now you know one of the dirty little secrets of successful bird tour leaders.

There is no question that using sounds is an effective way to attract birds. There are three common ways that birders use sounds to call in birds:

1. Pishing, <http://10000birds.com/pishing.htm> or using one’s own voice to make sounds that will make the birds curious to come and see what is going on, including imitating the Screech Owl whinny, (I have never mastered this technique, but I have heard imitators who are so good, you would think the bird was actually present);
2. Taped Screech Owl recordings, (or in the west, the Pygmy Owl) a generic call that will attract many species of birds; and
3. Taped recordings of the specific species you are trying to attract, which is the most controversial use of imitating calls to attract birds.



The taped calls seem to work because birds are naturally curious, and the pishing sounds simulate the calls of other birds who may have found food, or an owl to harass during the day time, (owls are sworn enemies of little birds, and it is believed that they may make a night time meal of a small bird they find, unhidden, at night). The taped calls of the specific species sought may cause a response out of curiosity, a need to defend a territory or nest site, or even perhaps the seeking of a sexy sounding mate.

My most interesting bird response to a Screech Owl taped call took place a number of years ago, during a Christmas Bird Count, when a Northern Goshawk responded, undoubtedly hoping to find a Screech Owl that could be converted into an easy meal. My most unusual Florida response to a taped Screech Owl call was the

arrival of a Least Flycatcher, quite rare winter visitor in Florida, along with a whole host of other species, out on Carlton Road, just south of Paleo Hammock. Occasionally a Screech Owl will respond to its own taped call during the daytime, but I never had one actually fly in until this past spring in Arizona. Out in Sunflower, AZ, Jewel and I were using the Western Screech Owl taped call to attract a good number of western species, from Bewick's Wren, to Summer Tanager, to Scott's Oriole, to Ash-throated Flycatcher, when lo and behold, at high noon, a Western Screech Owl landed on a branch directly over our heads and proceeded to call for a full twenty minutes, even though we stopped playing the tape immediately upon his/her arrival.



Here in Florida, in the winter, the first bird that will respond, usually very shortly after the tape starts playing will be either the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher or the Blue-headed Vireo. Shortly after that the White-eyed Vireo will arrive, and the longer the tape plays, Palm, Yellow-rumped and any other warbler species in the area, various woodpeckers, Robins, Cedar Waxwings, Towhees, Blue jays, and any number of additional species will show up. And Jewel is in the market for a taped call that will cause me to respond immediately to come do some chore she has in mind, but if you know of such a tape, please don't tell her.

Some purists oppose any use of taped calls for birds at any time. The most nuanced discussion of using taped calls that I am aware of is www.sibleyguides.com/2011/04/the-proper-use-of-playback-in-birding/ And the American Birding Association has a policy on the use of recordings as follows: "Limit the use of recordings and other methods of attracting birds, and never use such methods in heavily birded areas, or for attracting any species that is Threatened, Endangered, or of Special Concern, or is rare in your local area." www.aba.org/about/ethics.html

St Lucie Chapter of the Florida Master Naturalists
 With the Manatee Center & the St. Lucie Audubon Society
 Presents

Photographing Wildlife and Florida's Natural Places

A workshop for Photographers

March 9, 2013

The Manatee Center - 480 N. Indian River Drive - Fort Pierce, FL 34950 - 9:00 am – Noon
 Photography Session - Fort Pierce Inlet State Park 1 pm – 4 pm

Join photographers Mary White and John Nelson for a day of classroom and hands-on instruction at the Manatee Center in Fort Pierce. Florida's wild outdoors is full of special places and species that are found nowhere else on earth. This class will teach photographers of all levels not only the "How To's" of photography, but also the basics in species identification.

Instruction will include discussions on:

The proper use of long lens	Aperture and speed controls
Depth of Field Control	Macro photography
Proper use of fill flash	Discovering an animals comfort zone
Seasonal Shooting Schedules	Cost effective equipment in the digital age
Understanding Your Subject	Proper Outdoor Lighting Control
Photographing Special Behavior	Creating Photographic Opportunities
Must Have Photo Gear	Understanding Wildlife Behavior

Mary White is an award winning wildlife and nature photographer, and is currently the President of the St. Lucie Chapter of the Florida Master Naturalists.

John Nelson is a wildlife photographer, videographer, and owner of Florida's Wild Outdoors. John has produced educational video for non-profit groups including the St. Lucie Conservation Alliance, Audubon of Martin County, and Friends of Savannas Preserve State Park.

Together, our instructors and team of volunteer naturalists will provide you with a great experience to take your nature and wildlife photography to a new level.

Coming Attractions: April Field Trip & Speaker

**April Field Trip: Saturday,
April 6 or Sunday, April 7, 2013
for the 2nd Annual Bruce
Bardsley Memorial Bird-A-
Thon**

This event is a bit different! The Bird-A-Thon is similar to a walkathon in that it features participants who look for and record different species of birds and sponsors who pledge an amount of money for each species identified or simply donate to a participant. You can enter as an individual or team. Prizes will be awarded for the

most species identified in each category. More details on registration will be available at the March meeting. Email SLABirdathon@gmail.com or call Dorothy to register—772-349-6025.

**April Speaker: Thursday,
April 4 at 7 PM at the Oxbow
Eco-Center**

Grace Stock

Book Review: *Whistled Like a
Bird*



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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Fort Pierce, FL 34979