



LAUGHING GULL

President's Message

From Ed Bowes



Welcome back to all our members, new and seasoned! I look forward to a great year of programs and birding with you.

Those of you who have been members of St. Lucie Audubon for a while know John Nelson. He was our newsletter editor for several years. He also created a radio spot titled "The Audubon Moment"

for the local PBS station, WQCS. John sent me some exciting news over the summer related to the radio spots – he had been awarded a Together Green grant by Audubon Florida so that he could take "The Audubon Moment" statewide!

This is an incredible opportunity for John – congratulations!

IMPORTANT DATES

Bird Counts



Christmas Bird Count: December 14, 2013. Watch for more information!

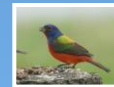


Bird-A-Thon: April 5 - 13, 2014. You have the option of counting one of those days. More details later.

Special Events



Adams Ranch Breakfast: Will be held in 2014. Watch for more information.



Painted Bunting Trip: Will be scheduled in 2014. Watch for more information.

First Meeting of the Season, Thursday October 3, 2013

Join us at the Oxbow Eco-Center on St. James Drive in Port St. Lucie for our first meeting of the 2013-2014 season.



Feathered Friends by Ruth Neese

I have been birding since I was 6 years old, and I am still frustrated by shorebird ID! These birds are small, fast, and usually far away from the observer. In Florida, this difficulty with ID is compounded by many migrants wearing winter plumage. Black-bellied Plovers are one of the confusing winter “peeps.”

In breeding plumage, a Black-bellied Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) does sport a chest, belly, face, and throat covered by black feathers. In the winter, these plovers look like the one on the right—just another drab, spotty brown peep amongst all the others! How would you know which bird you are

seeing?

First, if this plover is in a group, it will stand out as the *largest* plover in North America. Compared to other plovers, it has a *large, heavy bill*. Even without its breeding plumage, in flight this bird will display *black flanks and black axillary* (“armpit”) *feathers*. A sight hunter, Black-bellied Plovers exhibit feeding behavior of run, stop, hunt, peck, then run. Finally, these plovers are common on beaches, and according to National Audubon 99.9% of *large* plovers on beaches are Black-bellies. Good birding and good luck!



Black-bellied Plover in winter plumage.

Field Trip – Saturday October 5 to “Hidden” Port St. Lucie



Birding Port St Lucie: Meet at Rivergate Park 2200 SE Veterans Memorial Parkway (formerly Midport RD) in Port St Lucie by 8:00 AM sharp. We will carpool from there to several “hidden” birding spots in Port St Lucie a morning of local birding close to home! Call Dorothy at 772-349-6025 for more information.

Rivergate Park, Port St. Lucie, FL.

Hands Across the Lagoon

National Estuaries Day
 Saturday, September 28, 9-10 a.m.
 Stuart Causeway (South Side)

Parking available under causeway and at Stuart Beach. Participants are encouraged to carpool, bike or walk.

Hands Across the Lagoon events are occurring in five Indian River Lagoon counties to celebrate National Estuaries Day, call attention to the declining condition of our estuaries, and ask our leaders to make their health a top priority.

Freshwater discharges from Lake Okeechobee and devastating algae blooms are destroying the St. Lucie River Estuary and south Indian River Lagoon's sea grasses and oysters. Wildlife is under threat, with the unexplained deaths of many brown pelicans, manatees and dolphins in the northern lagoon.

Join hands at 9:45 a.m. for 15 minutes to show you care about the lagoon and want to see it restored to a healthy condition.

For more information:
FloridaOcean.org
 772-225-0505

Florida Oceanographic Society

Indian River Lagoon News and Events

Conservation Corner: Our Estuary, the Indian River Lagoon

By Ruth Neese

Our estuary, the Indian River Lagoon, has been in the news all summer. Unfortunately, it has not been good news. High water levels in Lake Okeechobee prompted the Army Corps of Engineers to increase fresh water discharges through the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie Rivers. Fresh water discharges started May 8 and have released 900,000 acre-feet of water from Lake Okeechobee. Both estuaries have suffered severe degradation as a result.

Here in St. Lucie County, heavy rains have caused increased pollution from agricultural and septic tank runoff. Instead of crystal clear blue water, we have seen brown murky water with dying sea grasses. The South Fork of the St. Lucie River has been hardest hit with fresh water discharges from the lake. The discharges caused large persistent blooms of toxic blue-green algae and health department warnings to avoid contact with river water. This year's fresh

water deluge has killed the restored oyster reef in the North Fork of the St. Lucie River, reversing years of hard work by volunteers and the Florida Oceanographic Society.

Depressing, right? Yes, but the damage has energized local residents. Multiple protests have been held and rallies are continuing to keep pressure on politicians. The next protest event is "Hands Across the Lagoon," scheduled for September 28, which is National Estuaries Day.

Audubon Florida approved the establishment of a new Regional Conservation Committee (RCC) for the Indian River Lagoon last year. Organizing the RCC is ongoing, but a *Call to Action* was issued this spring. This *Call to Action* stated that government leadership was essential to saving the lagoon because

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government has the power to construct improvements, regulate, fund, enforce, acquire land, mitigate and provide services. A healthy lagoon contributes an estimated \$3.7 billion to the coastal economy annually (EPA, 2007). Local governments can ill afford to lose that much money, thus giving county and municipal administrations additional incentive to help save the lagoon. So far, 130 local organizations and businesses have signed onto the *Call to Action*.

What can you do? First, contact your city and county commissioners and urge them to collaborate in solving the problem. Second, use only Florida-friendly fertilizer on your yard and do not fertilize during the rainy season. Third, if you have a septic system, make sure it is operating without spilling sewage into the groundwater or canals. Finally, go to Ft. Pierce for the Smithsonian Marine Station National Estuaries Day Festival at Museum Pointe Park. Our chapter will have a booth at the National Estuaries Day Festival from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM. Come to the event and learn the science behind what is happening to our estuary and learn more about what you can do to protect our national 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:

Ed Bowes & Ruth Neese

Treasure Coast Wildlife Center

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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

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Thanks for your support.

Special Field Trips in March, April, and May 2014!!

Expert birders Billi Wagner and Tim Towles will be leading owl prowls here in St. Lucie County on full moon nights in March, April, and May of 2014.

Mark the full moons on your calendars and be ready to have a "hooting" good time birding for owls.



A Barred Owl, a potential birding find on a St. Lucie County Owl Prowl.

Coming Attractions: November Field Trips & Speaker

November Field Trip:
Saturday, November 9 at 9:30 AM from downtown Ft. Pierce for a pontoon boat ride on the **Indian River Lagoon with Capt. Chop Lege.** The trip usually lasts 2 ½ hours. Reserve your seats early because space fills quickly!

November Speaker: Thursday, Nov. 7 at 7 PM at the **Oxbow Eco-Center in Port St. Lucie**

Sandy Komito, renowned birder, returns! Sandy holds the record for number of bird species seen in 1 year—748. Come and hear the inspiration for the book “The Big Year.”

“Big Year Birding”



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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