

# The Pelican

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River Audubon May, 2024

*For wildlife & people since 1923*



## May I Say Thank You

At the end of this month I will have served as President of Halifax River Audubon for 1 year. I use the title sparingly, for I feel that this is an organization that is really guided by a small, dedicated group of people, folks I am indebted to for their support, skill and determination. I hope you thank them for their work whenever you see them - David Hartgrove, Bob and Catherine Kellogg, Melissa Lammers, Ellen Tate and Carol Roberts. They have supported HRA tabling at community events, leading field trips, speaking for birds to the community and local government, speaking in a variety of outside forums, teaching at local nature centers and parks, representing HRA in a number of like-minded conservation and nature clubs and organizations. They did this while keeping the administrative side of HRA up and running.

We wind down our official season this month, too. The last push for field trips is underway and the schedule is quite literally a moving target as we try to pick the best time and places to watch as Spring Migration comes to a close. We have one or two tabling events to cover. We have some summer commitments at libraries and nature camps to staff. I hope to offer a field trip or two this summer. Maybe a boat trip...stand by for announcements.

It's time to measure our accomplishments through the last year. I had some lofty goals and a couple were met, but most were merely advanced. Going forward I want to streamline and simplify our processes, communicate effectively with our membership, and develop a strong message that will resonate throughout all of our activities and work.

Our board sat with Jacqui Sulek, of Audubon Florida, in March. It was a good session and had many constructive take aways. She continually emphasized that Audubon is a conservation organization. We are the local face of that organization in our community. Our activities and work have and will reflect the conservation ethic. This summer we will define the activities that will best support our initiatives.

Finally, to all of you who supported our field trips, manned our booth or helped us to set up the tent, came to a class or presentation, ran with the kids at the Great Backyard Bird Count, enjoyed an evening with Hitchcock, renewed your membership, reached out with your questions and much more: a heartfelt and gracious thank you. It's you who make this job fun.

*Joan Tague*

## Calendar & Events

**We're having another month with no general membership meeting. Over the summer the board will be working on finalizing a meeting schedule going forward. There have been requests for afternoon meetings, weekend meetings, meetings that don't require night driving. And there's always the Zoom route. Send us your thoughts.**

[forbirds@halifaxriveras.org](mailto:forbirds@halifaxriveras.org)

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## Field Trips

**Tuesday Bird Walks, Ormond Central Park-** Join Joan Tague for these casual walks on the trails in Ormond Central Park on Tuesday, May 7th and again on the 14th. Meet at the Ormond Beach Environmental Discovery Center, 601 Division Ave., Ormond Beach at 8:00 am for these 2 hour walks.

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## Field Trips With Others

**Saturday, May 11th, Eco Buggy, Longleaf Pine Preserve-** Join our friends with Volusia County for a family fun event. Climb aboard the eco-buggy with your family and explore Longleaf Pine Preserve. We'll make a few stops along the way and use dip nets, magnifying glasses, and microscopes to help us discover the plants and animals that live here. All ages are welcome. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Wear clothing and closed-toe shoes that can get muddy and wet. Reservations are required. Call Tommy Nordmann at 386-736-5927 extension 12072.

**Friday, May 31st, Hike Deep Creek Preserve-** Come explore Deep Creek Preserve on a two-mile hike and search for signs of some of the animals that live here. Learn about predator prey relationships and how these animals have adapted for survival. Ages ten and up are welcome, accompanied by an adult. Wear closed-toe shoes. Reservations are required. Call Tommy Nordmann at 386-736-5927 extension 12072.

## Conservation Notes

*Laurilee Thompson is co-owner of Dixie Crossroads Restaurant in Titusville, founder of the original Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival and an environmental heroine. One of the many things she does is water quality testing in the Indian River Lagoon. Below is her report from early April.*

I spent last Saturday morning water testing at my three Indian River Lagoon sites: Turnbull Creek where it passes under US 1 near the northern end of the Indian River, Beacon 42 Boat Ramp in Mosquito Lagoon, and under the bridge at Haulover Canal. At Turnbull Creek, salt has slowly infiltrated its way up the freshwater creek, just as it does every year at this time. It will soon be erased with the return of summer's rains. At Beacon 42, small patches of seagrass are expanding along the shoreline. A couple of schools of glass minnows played among the mangrove roots while mating manatees heaved the water nearby.

Haulover Canal was full of life, almost as much as when I fished there in the 1970s. Happy anglers pulled in slot-sized spotted sea trout and mangrove snappers. There were massive schools of glass minnows – two distinct sizes (one-inch minnows and two-inch minnows) that did not mix. Forster's and Royal Terns plucked them from the water's surface. The water was so clear I could see all kinds of colored sponges, algae, and other growth on the rocks, replacing the brown slime that has been the norm for such a very long time. Sea anemones waved their tentacles in the current.

After two summers of grazing on seagrasses that returned to Mosquito Lagoon, manatees are in better condition and have resumed their normal spring mating behavior. Judging by the amount of seagrass rhizomes that drifted by my station under the bridge, it appears that this will be the third summer of good seagrass growth in Mosquito Lagoon. Last week, I saw seagrass rhizomes coming from the Indian River side of the canal. I have no doubt there is hope for the recovery of our treasured Indian River Lagoon.

*Laurilee Thompson*

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"They have wings and they don't read books." That's what I tell people when someone reports a bird in some strange location. However there are extreme examples. Like the Yellow-billed Loon that showed up in the fountain at the Bellagio Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. The fountain is seen at the end of Ocean's 11, the 2001 George Clooney version.

This bird's home range is the Canadian Arctic and the coast of Alaska and British Columbia. The bird was there for several days. On March 5th the fountain show was postponed while the Nevada Department of Wildlife captured the bird and released it in an undisclosed location.

*David Hartgrove*

## Counting Nightjars

Nightjars is the collective nickname of the family, Caprimulgidae. The "capri" portion of that name refers to Capricorn, the goat. Back in the time of Aristotle people were convinced that the birds flew around at night and latched onto the teats of goats to suckle their milk, blinding the goat. Say what!?

In truth they eat insects, thousands a night. They have tiny beaks that open to a huge, bristle lined mouth. The inside is sticky and as they fly they vacuum up mosquitoes and other flying insects. There are several species seen here in Florida, including Common and Antillean Nighthawks, Eastern Whippoorwills and the largest, Chuck-Wills-Widows. Chucks have a distinctive 4 note call that's repeated over and over. They nest here, as do Common Nighthawks. The Center for Conservation Biology is a research group within The College of William and Mary and the Virginia Commonwealth University. They have an ongoing research project called the Nightjar Survey Network. I've been counting nightjars in Tiger Bay State Forest since the project began in 2007. The surveys are done once a year and are a point count, done along a 9 mile route with 10 stops. At each you count each bird you hear for 6 minutes. Then move a mile to the next stop and repeat.

This entire family of birds has seen dramatic drops in population. When I first moved into my home here in 1983, the birds calling in the field behind our house were so numerous that I couldn't determine how many there were. I haven't heard one in our neighborhood in 10 years. The last time I had a Common Nighthawk on my survey was in 2010. You can only count birds you hear. So when my friend, George Sibley, and I were doing the count on April 23rd of this year I couldn't count the 11 birds we saw in the road. It was a beautiful night, cool, with clear skies and a full moon. That's one of the requirements of the survey protocols, a count must be done on the night of the full moon or one night on either side of it. The sound of the Chuck-Wills-Widow still is heard here. There's just a lot fewer of them.

*David Hartgrove*



Chuck-Wills-Widow, photographed on Garden Key in the Dry Tortugas.  
*Photo by David Hartgrove*

Time once again for another in our continuing series, *Everyday Birding*, by Ray Scory.

## Roseate Spoonbill - a flash of pink

They are so beautiful. In the sky. By the pond. In the water. A stunning flash of pink surprise. When you come upon a wash of similar radiant color coating a grassy sandbar in a Florida wetland, you will know that you have witnessed something very special here in Florida. And one of the first words you will shout out is, "WOW!!!!!!!" You have spotted Roseate Spoonbills and that sighting alone you will cherish. Your own private experience. Stunning! Early yesterday morning I was looking out our backyard window eating breakfast, and watching a new day peacefully come awake - bringing new events yet to be realized. I looked off two to three miles to the horizon and noticed a thin line of birds flying East to West. The shape of the flock was that of a thin cigar with a sharp point at each end. They were moving fast, full of energy, wings pounding with purpose, straight lined discipline. I grabbed for my binoculars. Out from the morning haze they flew. A pink flash exploded as they passed through the emerging sunlight. Roseate Spoonbills. I was sure of my ID. I was thrilled. I have seen this formation before - more than a few times. Still I was excited. Focused.

Later, Jane and I were taking our evening walk around the circle at the front of our home. Dusk was making its entrance when Jane called out, "Roseate Spoonbills; over our house!" There they were passing by again - just over our roof top, same energy, same purpose of flight, same cigar-like formation and dynamic display of energy. Twice in one day. Thrilling.

It's not only a Roseate Spoonbill's color or their uniquely shaped bill that attracts and mesmerizes the hoards for people who witness such a beautiful bird, but their flying and the harmonious manner in which they flock together that also attracts our attention. Such military precision coupled with a creatively artistic bearing of the highest level that wants me to stay and wait around to see what's next - more of what they can visually answer.

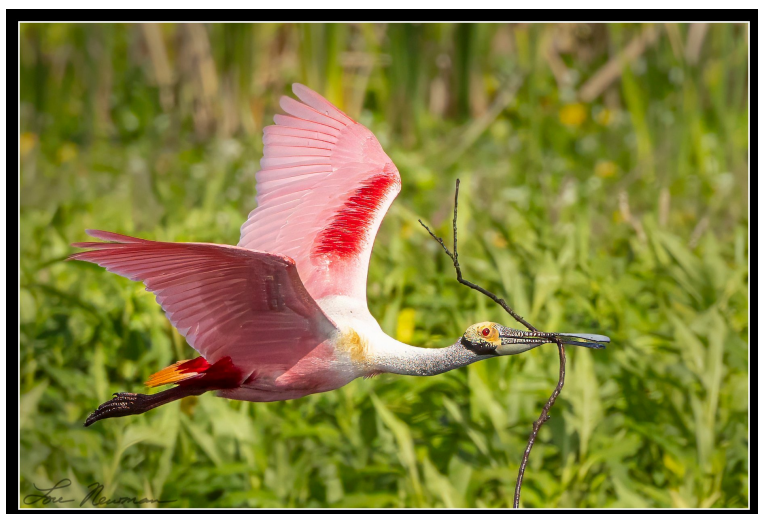
We can find them near water. it is their natural habitat and Florida is surrounded by water - around its borders and inside the land. A natural home for the Roseate Spoonbill. My experience leads me near ponds and still waters to see this magnificent bird. Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Titusville, Florida would be a good place to start. Pull over on Wildlife Drive, turn off the engine to your auto, sit there and just look. Absorb the scene. Let the moment filter through.

So peaceful; all too real. Heavenly.

*Ray Scory*



This photo was taken at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge. It illustrates the value of keeping open, natural land suitable for the beautiful bird life in Florida. *Ray Scory*



A spoonbill carries nesting material. *Photo by Lou Newman*

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## Endangered Species Ringtones, Free

The [Center for Biological Diversity](#) is offering free ringtones from all kinds of endangered species. From Elephant Seal pups to Hawaiian bird species to frogs, toads and mammals of all kinds, your phone will have its own unique sound. The [Yosemite Toad](#) sounds like a bird. The [Florida Panther](#) will certainly get your attention. The little [Elf Owl](#) sounds like it's chuckling to itself.

Currently these ringtones are only for users with Android, Blackberry and Windows phones. Those for iPhone users will be available soon. You'll need to sign up for the CBD's action network but you can easily cancel that at any time. Click the link above to get started. Once there you can click on the Preview link to make your selection. Then click the Download link.



Audubon Florida Chapter's Representative, Jacquie Sulek, giving Stephen Kintner the prestigious National Audubon Society Charles H. Callison Award for Volunteer of the Year!

### Stephen Kintner Receives Recognition

Way back in November of last year, at the 2023 Jay Watch Appreciation Event, West Volusia Audubon Society's Vice President and Conservation Chair, Stephen Kintner, was recognized for his monumental contributions to conservation.

Simply put there would be no Lyonia Preserve and no Environmental Learning Center without him. As he was winding down his long career as head of Volusia County Environmental Management he was able to get the funding approved for both. We all owe a debt of gratitude to Stephen for his tireless efforts on behalf of our county and its wildlife. Especially our state's only endemic bird species, the Florida Scrub-Jay.

*David Hartgrove*

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### From the Quotable Birder

"For many birds May is the most important month of the year, for it is their time of nesting. Their song now approaches its greatest perfection. Early in the month it expresses the rapture of courtship, later the joy of possession."

*Mrs. William Starr Dana, author of the first field guide to North American wildflowers.*



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### THE PELICAN

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### Halifax River Audubon

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Meets monthly September through May

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Past President: Melissa Lammers

Treasurer: Bob Kellogg

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Membership Sec.: Joan Tague

Corresponding Sec: Vacant

Historian: Vacant

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Education: Holly Zwart-Duryea

Field Trips: Joan Tague

David Hartgrove

Newsletter Editor: David Hartgrove

Welcome: Vacant

Webmaster: Joan Tague

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