Look back at our history
By Don Bansen, MCAS Historian

Article 1 of the Manatee County Audubon Society's articles of organization, adopted November 19, 1953, stated: "The object of the Society shall be to promote an understanding of and interest in native wildlife and further its conservation." Other articles described the elective officers, executive committee and other committees. Article 6 declared that regular meeting shall be held on the third Thursday evening of each month, from October to April.

Standing committees, appointed yearly, shall cover the fields of bird records, conservation, hospitality, membership, programs, publicity and tours. A 1953 newspaper article noted that MCAS planned to ask the Legislature to establish an animal pound here. Members said one was needed because stray dogs and cats are a menace to birds and small wildlife.

By 1956, the total membership had grown to 114. Meetings were held at the Jesse P. Miller school. Allen Hitch was president, Col. Kevin O'Shea, vice president, and Mrs. John V. Hullinger, secretary-treasurer. This was the year Manatee Audubon was invited to join National Audubon.

In 1957, meetings were moved back to the Garden Center and regular dues were collected. Christmas Bird Counts were done at Myakka State Park until 1958, when the first count was done in Manatee County.

Thirty eagles’ nests were recorded in Myakka State Park in 1959 for National Audubon, and 23 were recorded in Manatee County.

Letter from President Steve Black

Nature can alleviate your stress

As we go through these challenging times, I believe it is more important than ever to be in touch with nature as a way to alleviate stress. As you have now received your annual program brochure for Manatee Audubon, you can see that we have some wonderful projects, field trips, speakers, and events that will bring welcome relief.

Stress-reducing activities: With the help of the Sarasota Bay Buddies, led by Julia Burch and Rick Smith, we have completed our first TogetherGreen volunteer activity, by planting vegetation at Felts Audubon Preserve that will attract Rails. We also did some necessary weeding. Meantime, Roger Robson has been working with Terry Singer and Roy Singer to erect a wall in the Felts’ shed to protect valuable equipment. And as Barbara Singer reports on page 2, we have a group of Boy Scouts assembling more benches for Felts.

We are now in the early stages of planning for a building to house a Nature Center at Felts. A local architect, Charlie Ugarte, is doing the preliminary investigation to identify the building requirements that we would have to meet in going forward. We welcome any ideas you have on the proposed Nature Center. We also invite you to join us on Felts work days, which are scheduled for the last Saturday of each month. We start at 8 a.m. and work until noon. Come de-stress and help us progress.

Volunteer now for Christmas Bird Count. See page 4 for more information.
Sightings at Felts

By Lucette Womracher, Treasurer

During the week of September 14-21, there were 37 different species recorded at Felts Audubon Preserve.

The Great Horned Owls were spotted three times. Warblers are back. The ones seen were Yellow-throated, Black-and-white, and Northern Parula.

Other unusual sightings were a Ruby-throated Hummingbird and Barred Owl. Also the raccoons were still being seen.

The South pond has several immature Common Moorhens and also a family of Black-bellied Whistling Ducks was seen with at least five striped hatchlings.

Scouts assemble benches for Felts

By Barbara Singer, Ways and Means Committee Chair, and Bunny and Jack Schneider, Board Members

Pictured below right is Dominic Cox, a member of Scout Troop 64, who chose to build six benches for Felts Audubon Preserve as his Eagle Scout Project, the last step in a scout’s pursuit to obtain the Eagle Scout ranking, the highest rank in the Boy Scouts of America.

During the summer, Dominic researched and prepared the materials needed, raised the funds to purchase the wood and hardware and supervised eight scouts in assembling six benches using the molded ends donated by our members Jan and Roger Robson.

Our sincere thanks and congratulations goes out to Dominic for choosing Felts Preserve to help him obtain this great honor.

Wetlands Boardwalk:

Your Audubon Board has approved a project to construct a boardwalk using recycled material across the wetlands on the north side of the Felts Preserve. This will give us a safe and dry walkway into a lovely densely wooded area of our Preserve that has been inaccessible. The cost is estimated to be $30 per foot. We need your help to finance this exciting project. If you can help, please send your check, marked “walkway,” to MCAS, PO Box 14550, Bradenton, FL 34280-4550.

MCAS members Matt and Karen Holman, owners of the Wild Bird Center, located at the NE corner of University Avenue and Lockwood Ridge Road, donate the bird seed, fill the feeders, and even donate feeders for our Felts Audubon Preserve. If you need something for the birds, go see them.

Our new webmaster is adding new content

As you may have heard, David Ambrose has stepped down from maintaining our website for Manatee Audubon Society. We want to express our gratitude for all his work to promote our chapter and to give us a presence on the World Wide Web. Thank you, David.

Starting September 1, Tami McNally began maintaining the site. You may notice a few differences, but most of the work has been technical backend updates. However, you will see some new website content. For example, we have a page dedicated to the TogetherGreen events. In addition, we now have a submenu on the Felts Audubon Preserve page. The submenu enables you to access more specific information such as Hours and Events, Location, Bird List, and the Butterfly List. In the coming months, look for incremental changes such as adding an archive for newsletters.

We would like to hear from our general members and learn what they would like to see on our website. We are starting an enhancement list for the 2009/2010 year. To contact us with your ideas, email webmaster@manateeaudubon.org

Save the date April 25, 2009

We are busy planning another exciting and educational Earth Day celebration at Felts Audubon Preserve. Just like last year - we will have activities for all ages. Mark your calendars.
Learn how to attract Purple Martins

The connection between humans and Purple Martins started in prehistoric time and follows through to the present day, according to Lea Etchells, an environmental specialist and longtime Purple Martin landlord.

Lea is the speaker for the Manatee Audubon meeting at 7:30 p.m. Thursday October 16 at the First Presbyterian Church, 1402 Manatee Avenue West, Bradenton. Her topic is: “Purple Martins: How to attract and be a good landlord.” Please join us for the first meeting of our new season.

As a P.M. landlord for eight years in Bradenton, Lea has learned a few things about how to attract and maintain a colony of Purple Martins, and she plans to share what she knows at the meeting. If you have seen the gourds at Felts Audubon Preserve, you know about a gourd rack, which consist of a pole with 12 hanging gourds. These are ideal for Purple Martins, Lea says. The picture above is one she took of the rack in her backyard. She says that her rack of gourds usually runs about 75 to 100 percent capacity. She recommends that other people use gourds to attract and maintain Purple Martins in their neighborhood.

Lea also plans to talk about the hows and whys that Indians came to keep them —see photo on the newsletter cover of Indians with Purple Martins. But, she says, mosquitoes are NOT among the reasons that these birds were popular with the Indians.

Editor’s note: K. Lea Etchells is an environmental specialist with the Bureau of Plant and Apiary Inspection, Division of Plant Industry, Florida Department of Agriculture. Lea is a longtime member of Manatee Audubon Society.

Audubon Assembly to meet October 24-25

Barbara Singer and Bunny and Jack Schneider will represent Manatee Audubon at the 2008 Audubon Assembly to be held Friday and Saturday, October 24-25, at the Plantation Resort and Spa on the banks of the Crystal River on Florida’s Nature Coast. Audubon Assembly brings together Audubon leaders and members from all over Florida to set Florida’s conservation agenda, socialize, and enjoy nature. The theme of this year’s Assembly is “Saving Birds in a Changing Environment.” Gov. Charlie Crist is scheduled to deliver the keynote address at the Friday night dinner. If you would like more information, go to the website at www.audubonofflorida.org. You can register online at that website if you want to attend.

Audubon Assembly to meet October 24-25

Sat 10/4
Field trip and Open House Felts Audubon Preserve. Depart 7:30 a.m. from Main Post Office. Jack & Bunny Schneider, 792-1794. Felts Open House 8 a.m. to noon

Thu 10/16
Monthly meeting 7:30 p.m. First Presbyterian Church, 1402 Manatee Avenue West, Bradenton

Sat 10/18
Field trip to Saddle Creek Park, Lakeland. Depart 6:30 a.m. from Main Post Office. MCAS group will join Lake County Audubon for birding walk at 8 a.m. Bring lunch, sunscreen and bug repellent. This should be peak migration for this area. Connie Zack, 758-2929.

Fri-Sat 10/24-25
Audubon Assembly, Crystal River. To attend, register online www.audubonofflorida.org.

Sat 10/25
Workday at Felts Audubon Preserve 8 a.m. to noon. Everyone invited.

Reserve early for Bird Watching Course

By Nancy and Bob Dean

Please remember that reservations for the MCAS January 2009 Beginning Bird Watching Course may be made beginning November 1. Last spring and summer, a record 12 individuals each reserved one of the 36 available spaces. Further, Sarasota Audubon is not sponsoring a course this year and may be directing interested persons to the MCAS course. It is important, therefore, to make early reservations by calling Nancy Dean at 941-792-9235.

Classes will begin at 6:30 p.m. and last until 8:45 a.m. on Mondays and Thursdays of the last two weeks of January. Class dates are January 19, 22, 26 and 29. In addition, there will be two field trips beginning at 7 a.m. on the last two Saturdays, January 24 and 31. The course fee is $35 for MCAS members. The $50 fee for non-members includes the first year of MCAS membership.

Editor’s note: K. Lea Etchells is an environmental specialist with the Bureau of Plant and Apiary Inspection, Division of Plant Industry, Florida Department of Agriculture. Lea is a longtime member of Manatee Audubon Society.
Help wanted to count birds this Christmas

By David Williamson, CBC Chair

Christmas Bird Count (CBC) season is fast approaching. The Bradenton Circle will be surveyed on Saturday December 20. The Gulf Circle, which is focused on the beaches and the bay, will be counted on Tuesday December 30. The Audubon Christmas Bird Count is the oldest and largest citizen science event in the world. For more than 100 years, people have gathered during the winter holiday season to count birds. Our current Bradenton and Gulf Circles have been counted consistently for more than 25 years.

While there is a specific methodology and you need to count birds within the Christmas Bird Count circle, everyone can participate. If you are a beginning birder, you will be able to join experienced bird watchers. Beginners, casual birdwatchers, and advanced birders are all welcome, and needed.

We usually get around 40 people in the Bradenton Circle and we seem to barely get it done. Many areas go unsurveyed and many teams could use more help. For the Gulf Circle, we get around 15 to 20 people and we do okay there. It is a fun count with all of the waders and shorebirds we see. We welcome new participants in both counts. It requires only a few hours of time in the morning, but we do have groups that work all day, if they like. There is no cost to participants.

Contact David Williamson if you want more information or would like to sign up. You can reach me by email at david@localbirder.com or by phone at 941-378-9920. I recall the 2006 count when my daughter Jessie and I were surveying the Heritage Harbor community in the Bradenton Circle. We heard some sandhill cranes in the distance and worked our way around some houses to see the pastures nearby. I started counting and didn’t stop until I counted all of them. We had never seen more than 30 cranes in the entire circle in one year. Much less one survey area. But on this occasion, I counted 89 cranes and then counted again to confirm the number. It was amazing!

Send your items for The Night Heron to newsletter editor Molly McCartney at ms mccartney@sprintmail.com or call 778-3228