**Letter from President Steve Black**

**Our field trips are the best bargain in town**

**With money being tight now**, one of the best bargains around is a Manatee Audubon field trip. We do suggest that you contribute gas money to the driver if you ride in a car pool. But unlike many other chapters, we don’t charge anyone anything to go on our trips. As the chairman of our field trip committee, Connie Zack works very hard to provide trips you will enjoy. So we are all a bit concerned about the light turnouts we have had so far this year. We are also puzzled as to how anyone would pass up the chance to participate in one of the great outdoor adventures that these trips represent. So we would like to hear from you about this.

**We are also interested** in knowing about any places you would like to go. Our field trips are pretty much set for this year, but we are starting already to think about next year, so send in any suggestions you may have.

**The guides selected for our field trips** are skilled in identifying birds. Very importantly, the guides go to great lengths to make sure that everybody gets to see the birds. When we have inexperienced birders with us on the trips, we make sure they get extra attention. And there is a great field trip tradition of sharing binoculars and birdscopes, so that everyone has a chance to see as many birds as possible. So take advantage of these field trip bargains. Lucette and Bob Wombacher are leading a trip to the Carlton Reserve on December 6, as you can see from their page 4 report. Bob and Nancy Dean are coordinating a Tampa Bay Circle field trip on January 14. Come on out and bring a friend or two with you.

**Join the Christmas Bird Count in the Bradenton Circle on Saturday December 20 and you’re likely to see Hooded Mergansers like this one, according to David Williamson, CBC Chairman. The Gulf Circle count is scheduled for Tuesday December 30. For more information, see David’s report on page 4.**

**Black-crowned Night Heron**

In 1969, there was a flap over an abandoned Eagle’s nest on property owned by Dr. W.D. Sugg. He wanted to cut down the tree with the nest and place the nest in the South Florida Museum. Harry Bower, chairman of the Manatee Audubon Eagle Committee, opposed the tree-cutting. But the matter was settled when the U.S. Interior Department sent a representative with the authority to display the nest in the museum. When the tree came down, there was a big surprise in the nest. It apparently had been abandoned by Eagles, but it wasn’t empty. Instead, it had two 2-month-old Great Horned Owls. The owls were given to Pam Stewart, who cared for wild birds at the time, and the nest went to the museum.

Pollution problems in Tampa Bay and Palma Sola Bay provoked much concern and discussion in 1970, which turned out to be a very busy year. Sanctuary signs were placed on Flamingo Cay, while bulldozers were clearing out contested areas on Perico Island. Manatee Audubon started a newsletter. And the Eagle Committee ceased functioning formally, although its members promised to maintain an unofficial watch.

The 1970 Christmas Bird Count reported 138 species, compared to the 1969 total of 132. But the Eagle population was decreasing - only one young Eagle in five nests.

Look back at our history

By Don Bansen, MCAS Historian

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Work off Thanksgiving calories at Felts

By Tom Heitzman, Vice President

Our next work day at the Felts Audubon Preserve is November 29, the Saturday after Thanksgiving. Come out and give us a hand and burn off some of that pumpkin pie while helping improve the property.

Willing hands needed: We will have a couple of projects going on that we could use your help. Roger Robson, the bridge builder, is in need of some strong backs to help start placing some of the concrete monuments for the new boardwalk. We will have some carts and sleds but need some willing hands.

Invasive plant removal: An easier job will be helping with invasive plant removal. We will target one or two species that can be hand pulled or popped out with a small shovel. If we get these invasive plants while they are small, they will not be around to go to seed next year.

Our new mower, pictured right, has come in and is being put to good use. If you see someone mowing, it is most likely Fred Allen, who now mows with a big smile on his face. Having replaced our slow but reliable old mower with a new one, Fred can now do his volunteer mowing in half the time. I am sure you will notice a difference in how nice the paths and parking areas are kept. We will also be able to keep some of the more invasive plants under better control with the new mower.

Yellow jacket nest: As always there is a lot to do at the Felts Preserve. A new addition to the property is a large yellow jacket nest. These insects, which are a type of wasp, are as much at home at the preserve as the birds that come to visit. The large nest, located in the ground, will most likely be abandoned by the spring. The nest is well away from the path but can easily be observed from across the pond. To view, walk along the east side of the pond by the wildflower meadow. When you get to the first bench, look across the pond to the west. The nest is just on the bank of the pond on the west side. As always, there’s lots to see and do at the preserve so come out and give us a hand and enjoy that extra piece of pie.

Forty butterfly species spotted at Felts

As a result of the spring 2008 Butterfly Count sponsored by NABA, the North America Butterfly Association, 40 butterfly species have now been spotted and identified at Felts Audubon Preserve. That is the latest count received from Don Stillwaugh of St. Petersburg. Seven new species were added in 2008 including the Long-tailed Skipper and Fulvous Hairstreak. The list, which was started in 2005 by sightings of Black and Palmedes Swallowtails by Fred Allen, is available at Felts Open House days. —Submitted by Jeanne Schlesinger
**Sixth grader to discuss history of Felts**

By Steve Black, President

*We will have a special speaker* at our December 18 meeting, rather than the movie mentioned in your annual brochure. The speaker will be Matthew Israel, a sixth grader at St. Stephen’s Episcopal Elementary School in Bradenton and a budding historian. We met Matthew when we went to his school at the request of two of the St. Stephen’s teachers, Carrie Smith and Jeanne Bothsby, as part of our education program.

*We gave presentations to the classes* as well as provided Audubon Adventures. In addition, we provided a Sibley Guide to Birds for both classes to share as well as Bird Identifying CDs for bird identification. There were also four field trips to Felts. Because of these activities, Matthew has become an avid birder and chose to write an article on Felts Audubon Preserve for a presentation at his school’s history fair.

Matthew has done a lot of research on his Felts project, and he has interviewed a number of people about Felts including Gary Felts, Bob and Nancy Dean, Nick Baden as well as your president. It is very gratifying to see our efforts pay off.

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**FISH Clean-up:** More than 75 Bay Buddies participated in invasive plant and trash removal at the FISH Preserve in Cortez on November 8, as part of our third TogetherGreen Volunteer Event sponsored by National Audubon with a generous grant from Toyota. The event was a partnership effort between the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program, the Bay Buddies, Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage (FISH), Sarasota Audubon and Manatee Audubon. Kids of all ages helped restore 25 of the 100 preserve acres located on Sarasota Bay. After three hours of hard work, FISH had less trash and fewer invasive plants. And the kids had snacks, drinks and prizes.

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By Dee Hanny, field trip leader to Celery Fields

*Nine persons took part in the November 8 trip* to the Celery Fields, where we sighted 36 species. The most notable were a Sedge Wren and a Marsh Wren. We shared the area with a Sarasota Audubon group of about 30-40 persons. Their club has a field trip to this location the first Saturday of each month. An unusual happening took place while we were there. The SAS group split into three separate groups and went to different areas. One group was along the Palmer Boulevard marsh area looking into the reeds when an adult Bald Eagle landed right above their heads on an electric light structure. Since they were concentrating on the reed area, no one in their group realized the Eagle was over their heads. Our group was near the gazebo, about 75 yards from their group. After several tries, we finally were able to make them aware of the Eagle. Six persons in our group also went to Pinecraf Park, but only five species, all flyovers, were seen. A special thanks to Barry Rossheim of Venice for joining us and sharing his scope and his expertise.
You are cordially invited to count birds!

By David Williamson, CBC Chair

Members and guests are invited to participate in Audubon’s longest-running tradition, the annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC), held in Bradenton on Saturday December 20 and on Anna Maria Island on Tuesday December 30. Both counts are open to everyone and you may participate in one or both counts. This is one of the best learning opportunities for beginning birders and those friends and family members who aren’t (yet) birders.

In each circle we will complete a census of the birds found in the 15-mile diameter circle. Many teams will congregate on the morning of the event and canvas their assigned area along with an experienced birder who will lead them.

This event was first brought to Manatee County all the way back in 1906 as 76 birds were counted on December 28 of that year. Those results along with others from 1900 to the present are available at Audubon’s website: www.audubon.org/bird/cbc. Contact David Williamson at his email address: david@localbirder.com if you want to help.

Call now to register for March trip to Lake Apopka and Zellwood

By Arlene Flisik, Vice President

The March 7-8 overnight field trip to Lake Apopka. Emerald Marsh and vicinity is getting closer, and some members already have phoned me about taking part. You may know the area better as the Zellwood fields, where farms used to be flooded in the late summer, attracting zillions of shorebirds. That ended because agriculture pollution was ruining Lake Apopka. The state bought the land and began restoration, but had a setback when pesticide residue leached out of the ground and killed a lot of fish-eating birds. That problem was corrected and the area now gets Christmas Bird Counts of over 170 species and many days with over 40,000 individual birds. There are large wetlands but also other habitats in the area, so we will see a lot of diversity in our visit. We will do this trip by carpool. Contact me by phone at 746-1991 to get on the list. Please register by January 31.

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

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