Look back at our history

By Don Bansen, MCAS Historian

Mrs. W. L. Cornwell became president in 1970, and at her request, she was placed in the Southwest District of the Pollution Control Department, Sarasota.

The Cross Florida Barge Canal work stopped in 1971. Sanctuary signs were placed in the Boy Scout camp and several other locations. The Junior Science Museum project was supported. Beercan Island ownership was questioned. The Christmas Bird County reported 129 species. National Audubon was divided into regions and Florida was placed in the Southeast Region.

Membership in the Manatee County Audubon Society was 214 in 1972. Gun laws were examined and an effort made to outlaw any shooting in the western half of the county and to make that a sanctuary. The Beercan Island problem was turned over to the county by the State of Florida and petitions were signed protesting its development. Recycling of glass was urged and the Conservation Council of Manatee County was incorporated as a non-profit organization. More photographs started to appear in the scrapbook.

In 1973, a summer bird count noted 104 species. Collecting postage stamps for the Eagle Fund continued. The Christmas Bird Count resulted in 123 species. Mrs. Cornwell, still president, began using bus transportation on a trial basis for longer field trips.

Help needed with weeds, building, publicity

First of all, I would like to say how blessed we are to have talented people who are doing the work it takes to make us a successful chapter. When we take on a big commitment such as Felts, it takes contributions from many factions to accomplish the work that is required. One vital job is pulling weeds and removing exotics. But we also need skilled people to help us complete our building projects (call Roger Robson at 776-9711 if you can help).

In addition to Felts, we have a number of projects to be proud of: One is the TogetherGreen program of volunteer events, sponsored by National Audubon with a grant from Toyota. To be one of two chapters chosen in Florida for this grant is really something in which we take pride. We have completed three TogetherGreen projects and three more are scheduled: February 28, April 4 and April 25.

The area in which we need the most help is something that everybody can help with. We need new members who are willing to get involved. So please talk to your friends and neighbors about Manatee Audubon and invite them to a meeting. All of our talented leaders could use help. Just look at your Annual Brochure, and you will see all of the Standing Committees that could use your assistance. The two most vital areas of need are in publicity and membership recruitment. You don’t have to devote much time to make a difference. We can provide the training you need if you are willing to make the effort. If for some reason, you are not able to help, then you could give your support by thanking the people listed on the Annual Brochure for their efforts.

Saturday April 25 - Earth Day at Felts Audubon Preserve
**Felts Audubon Preserve**

Located in Palmetto
4600 24th Avenue East
Corner of 24th Avenue East and 49th Street East
(Experimental Farm Road).

Open House
on First Saturday of the month

Work Day
on Last Saturday of the month

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**Sightings at Felts**

By Tami McNally, Secretary

Thanks to everyone for reporting your sightings. For the complete bird list, see our Manatee Audubon website: www.manateeaudubon.org

New sightings:
Red-tailed Hawk

Continued sightings:
American Goldfinch, American Kestrel, American Robin, Bald Eagle, Black-and-white Warbler, Cooper’s Hawk, Double-crested Cormorant, Eastern Bluebird, Eastern Phoebe, Killdeer, Pine Warbler, Red-winged Blackbird, Ring-billed Gull, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Yellow-throated Warbler

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Fred Allen reported on December 7 that he had spotted a Pine Siskin, like the one depicted above, in with a flock of Goldfinches at Felts.

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**T o flourish, F elts needs controlled burn**

By Barbara Singer, Ways and Means Chair

**After recently touring Felts Audubon Preserve**, a representative of the Division of Forestry recommended that we consider a mitigation burn to keep a potential uncontrollable wildfire from happening at Felts. By using a prescribed burn, we lower existing available fire fuel (leaves, grasses and small twigs), prevent future wildfires and help ecological restoration. We also want to be considerate of our neighbors, since Felts is in a residential area.

**After evaluating all the issues, the Board of Directors has approved a mitigation burn** by the Division of Forestry for the area south of the entry road. The burn will take place sometime after mid-January. Since the burn is wind dependent, it can only be done when the wind is coming from the North. We will receive short notice as to the date of the burn. If you are considering going to Felts on a week day after January 15, please call the Manatee County Audubon Society at 729-2222 to find out if the burn is scheduled for that day. You will not be allowed into Felts the day of the burn.

**Also, we need your help to get ready for the burn.** We need to remove the fire fuel from the base of all of our young trees, and clear out the corral area. We will have work days on Sunday, January 11 and Saturday January 17 to handle these tasks. We also need a few people to take the bluebird houses down the day before the burn and put them back up the day after the burn. If you can help with the houses, please leave your name and phone number on the MCAS recorder at 729-2222.

**Historically and prehistorically, fire has been part of our landscape.** Every two to four years lightning will ignite the grassy prairies of our state’s upland areas. Most native plants are adapted to this. After a fire, nutrients are released back into the soil and the ground is ready for seed to grow. Many species actually depend on this cycle. By burning periodically, the leaf litter (fire fuel) is burned so that it can’t build up. The build up of fuel is what leads to out-of-control wildfires that can have devastating effects on pines, oaks and houses. When the prairies burn periodically, the wild out-of-control fire is eliminated. This type of fire is very good for gopher tortoises and other species that graze. The fire creates new nutrients that the plants utilize making the new sprouts more nutritious. Other benefits are the creation of good habitat for ground birds such as quail, improvement of our wildflower meadow since we will be adding nutrients and hopefully the elimination of some invasive plant species.

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**Felts historian speaks to MCAS**

Matthew Israel, a sixth grader at St. Stephen’s Episcopal Elementary School in Bradenton and a budding historian, presented a special program on the history of Felts Audubon Preserve at the December 18 meeting of Manatee Audubon Society.

Matthew based his presentation on the research he did for a school history project. After interviewing more than a dozen people, including Gary Felts, Bob and Nancy Dean, and Steve Black, the sixth grader assembled photographs and other materials on Felts. He then mounted his work as a stand-alone exhibit that is taller than he is.

That’s Matthew, right, standing in front of his history board exhibit, which won him top honors in the Manatee County History Fair.

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**Photo by Ivan Marion**
CBC sets new records

By David Williamson, Christmas Bird Count Chair

Thanks to a last minute surge of volunteers we set some new records this year for the Bradenton Circle count on Saturday December 20. A record 48 volunteers counted 125 species—7 more than the previous record set last year. The morning started out foggy and it didn’t lift until 9:30 a.m. in some areas, but we still saw 22,149 individual birds. It turned out to be a fantastic day for birding and the average number of species found by each group was 58. Nine groups identified at least one unique species that no other group found. Overall it was a banner year for the Christmas Bird Count. Hopefully we will have the same turnout next year—birds and birders. Here are the team members and highlights from the day:

• Team 1—Steve Black, Barbara Singer, Martha Staub: 25 Sandhill Cranes and one of only two Red-tailed Hawks.
• Team 2—Ivan Marion, Lucette Wombacher, Linda Naismith, Sue Rohl: 14 Ospreys and the only Black Skimmers.
• Team 3—Lynn Jacobowitz, Barry Rossheim: 76 Glossy Ibis and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet.
• Team 4—Carrie Smith, Lois Behan, Rachel Jones: a rare Baltimore Oriole and one of two Chipping Sparrows.
• Team 5—Jack Schneider, Bunny Schneider, Ruth Rowland, Lea Etchells, Jean Turner: Nine Wood Ducks and two Ruby-crowned Kinglets.
• Team 6—Carol Webster, Sue Derovec, Rosemary Havens: One of two Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and 30 American Coots.
• Team 7—Jeanne Dubi, Karen Jensen (Landfill and east of I-75): eight Bald Eagles, the count’s only Ruddy duck, and Ring-necked Ducks.
• Team 8—Rick Greenspun, Kathryn Young, Tom Heitzman, Richard Beaupre: three White-winged Doves and the only Horned Grebes in the count.
• Team 9—Connie Zack, Sue Dickie, Mike Barnes, Nancy Barnes: An American Oystercatcher, the only Sanderlings and Long-billed Dowitchers.
• Team 10—Mike Corso, Al Richardson, Judy Bien, Don Holloway, Carol Brigham, Lee Zerkel: 403 American White Pelicans, 15 Black-crowned Night Herons and our only Red Knot.
• Team 11—Don Benson, Bobbi Benson, Jan Robson, Roger Robson: 228 Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, seven Indigo Buntings, and our first Eastern Bluebirds on count day since 1994.
• Team 12—David Williamson, Diane Serpi, Daniel Somodi, Bill Hentges: American Wigeon, Barred Owls and House Finches.
• Team 13—John Ginaven, David Manchester, Peter Rice, Randy West (Robinson Preserve): Northern Bobwhite, our first Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Least Sandpiper, Western Sandpiper, Magnificent Frigatebird.

The survey area for the Gulf Circle, counted Tuesday December 30, extends from Palma Sola Bay including Perico and Cortez to the northern tip of Anna Maria Island (AMI) and south to Bishop Bayou on Longboat Key (LBK). There were 22 volunteers this year that split into 4 separate groups. They found 84 different bird species, which is similar to the last few years. The grand total was 8,904 birds compared to about 6,000 last year and 8,000 the year before.

• North End AMI—Mike Corso, Steve Black, Sue Dickie, Judy Bien: With the most streets to travel, and less beach and bay access, this group still came through with the biggest shorebird count of 62 Sanderlings. They also turned in the biggest number of Brown Pelicans (472) and Double-crested Cormorants (733) as well.
• Perico and N. Central AMI—Rick Greenspun, Kathryn Young, Dick Ware, Nancy Wilson, Ann Vassilavos, Betty Cullen: Perico Bay Club is always good for ducks. The group found Mallards, Mottled Ducks, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Lesser Scaup and Red-breasted Mergansers.
• Cortez and S. Central AMI—John Ruckdeschel, Susan Anderson, Pat Lantz, Shirley McGinnis, Mike and Nancy Barnes: The largest group of the count found the most birds at nearly 3,200 including 55 Forster’s Terns, 100 Caspian Terns, nearly 500 gulls and 500 White Ibis, and almost 300 American White Pelicans near Cortez.
• Leffis Key south to LBK—John Ginaven, Stu Wilson, Carrie Smith, Lois Behan, John Van Zandt, Molly McCartney: this group stuck gold with 60 Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, 78 Yellow-rumped Warblers, 34 American Goldfinches, 27 Pine Warblers, two Ruby-crowned Kinglets, 5 Yellow-throated Warblers.

Upcoming Events

Wednesday 1/14
Field trip Tampa Bay Circle Bob and Nancy Dean 792-9235. Depart 7 a.m. Main Post Office or join us at Terra Ceia bridge or Sunshine Skyway bridge north rest area. “Please arrive at either of these meeting points early enough to ensure that we will not miss you,” Deans said. “Additional stops may include Saw Grass Lake, Weedon Island Preserve, Williams County Park, E.G. Simmons Park and Cockroach Bay. Each participant needs a hat, sturdy shoes, sunblock, mosquito repellent and bag lunch.”

Thursday 1/15
Monthly meeting 7:30 p.m. Julia Burch to speak on “Sarasota Bay: Past, Present and Future.” First Presbyterian Church, 1402 Manatee Avenue West, Bradenton

January 19, 21 and 22
Sarasota Boat Rides Ron and LaDonne Mayberry, coordinators, 795-4685. Maximum five each trip.

January 19, 22, 26 and 29
Bird Watching Classes Nancy and Bob Dean, 792-9235. Includes field trips 1/24 and 1/31.

Saturday 1/24

Saturday 1/31
Workday at Felts Audubon Preserve 8 a.m. to noon. Everyone invited.

Saturday 2/7
Field trip Mosaic Fertilizer, Eastern Manatee. Meet 7 a.m. at Albertsons (closed), corner Erie Road and U.S. 301 near Parrish. Mosaic to provide lunch so sign up at January 15 meeting to be counted for lunch. Patty Petruff, 747-1789 home and 730-0579 cell.

Welcome New Members:
Trip to premier birding areas is approaching

By Arlene Flisik, Vice President

The March 7-8 field trip to two of Florida’s premier birding spots, Emeralda Marsh and Lake Apopka (formerly known as Zellwood farm fields), is getting closer, and reservations must be made by January 31. To sign up or ask questions, contact Arlene at 746-1991 or by email at smrlauduboner@peoplepc.com or sign up at January 15 meeting.

Both these primarily wetland areas are being restored after long years of degradation. Species seen there over the years have now surpassed 270. This is a car-pool outing. Travelers should be en route by 6:30 a.m. on Saturday March 7. We should arrive at Ferndale Preserve on Lake Apopka by 9:15 a.m., where we’ll meet acclaimed birding guide Gallus Quigley and spend the rest of the morning walking trails and boardwalks. Around noon, we’ll leave for Emeralda, stopping to picnic at Twin Lakes Park, where there are bathrooms and perhaps some birds to see. We’ll be at Emeralda by around 1:30 p.m. and spend all afternoon birding by car and sometimes on foot. At sundown, we’ll leave for the Leesburg Microtel, and decide on dinner. Sunday we go to Lake Apopka. We also visit Mount Dora for a picnic at Gilbert Park.

Cost for lodging: room with one queen bed, double occupancy, $52 per person; single is $86. Room with two queens, double occupancy, is $57 per person. Full deposit, payable by check to Manatee County Audubon Society, is due January 31. Send to Manatee Audubon, c/o A. Flisik, 4106 24 Ave. W., Bradenton FL 34205, or give to Arlene at January 15 meeting. You will also be responsible for Saturday dinner and your share of the driver’s gas.

Backyard Birding

Set for February 13-16

The 12th annual Great Backyard Bird Count is set for February 13-16. This is an easy, free way to participate in monitoring our national bird populations. During the four days, you can participate for as little as 15 minutes or as many hours as you wish. Count the highest number of individuals of each bird species you see together at one time and report your results online at www.birdcount.org. If you want more information, visit the web site or pick up a handout at our January 15 general meeting.

Birders see 49 species at Carlton Reserve

By Lucette Wombacher

Charlie Sample of the Venice Area Audubon Society led 18 of us through the back roads of Carlton Reserve on December 6. It was a picture perfect day that started out cool but quickly warmed up. Red-headed Woodpeckers and American Kestrels showed repeatedly. Ducks were scarce, but we all got a good look at a family of Black-bellied Whistling Ducks with three immatures. They did not seem to be at all bothered by the alligators sharing the same area. Thanks to Charlie, who guided our caravan, we covered many miles not usually open to the public, and saw 49 species.

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