Look back at our history

By Don Bansen, MCAS Historian

The 1974 Christmas Bird Count reported 21,000 Tree Swallows and 7,000-plus Robins, an exceptional number, which helped raise the total count to 58,000 individuals of 140 species. The 1975 CBC counted 61,734 individual birds and 138 species.

Manatee County Audubon Society had 321 members as of October 15, 1975. The chapter circulated a petition for signatures and presented it to the U.S. Corps of Engineers urging the Corps to deny Deltona Corporation permission to dredge and fill on Marco Island. There were also protests to Beker Phosphate Company, which wanted to build dams on the Little Manatee River and Wingate Creek.

Eagles seemed to be making a comeback with additional nests located and activity in known nests. There were 12 field trips in the 1975-76 year and four were by bus.

In 1976, the chapter’s treasury had $295.32 in the regular fund and $126.21 in a special fund.

The 1976 CBC found 126 species and 22,683 individuals. Artist and wildlife expert Guy Coheleach visited, lectured and displayed some of his pictures. Memorial books were given to the Palmetto Library in honor of two deceased members.

Letter from President Steve Black

Earth Day at Felts to feature Florida Panther

Our Earth Day Celebration this year takes place at Felts Audubon Preserve on Saturday April 25. Nancy Keegan is our chairman for the event, and she has been making plans for a Florida Panther to be on display as well as providing interesting wild birds to view up close. Volunteers will create a butterfly garden near the bird blind. We had over 500 people there last year, and we would like to have even more this year. There will be interesting informative speakers, guided nature walks and assorted foods. And, of course, we always have interesting visitors showing up like the Painted Bunting, Great Horned Owl, and Barred Owl. Nancy is also working on other surprises which will make it well worth your time to attend.

In case you were not at our last meeting, I would like to recommend a book about the adventures of hiking the Appalachian Trail. One of the authors is our own Bunny Schneider. This book is a very humorous entertaining book that shows what perseverance and courage it takes to hike the 2,175 miles of the trail, which runs from Maine to Georgia. Bunny and her Mountain Marching Mamas made the journey over 21 years. This book sells on the Appalachian Trail website for $21.95, but Bunny has very generously allowed Manatee Audubon to sell the book for $15, with profits going to Manatee Audubon. The book can be ordered by mailing your check for $17.50 to MCAS, P.O. Box 14550, Bradenton FL 34280. This book will make a wonderful present for your friends and relatives. I have already sent copies to my sister and my son.

I also want to encourage everyone to visit our updated website (www.manateeaudubon.org), which is very easy to navigate and provides a great deal of information. We thank Tami McNally for all the work she has done in giving the website its new look. Our website is in expert hands.

P inwheels, P ower and P hone C alls. D etails page 3.
Felts Audubon Preserve is 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

Sightings at Felts

By Tami McNally, Secretary

New Sighting:
House Finch

Recent Sightings:
American Goldfinch
American Kestrel
American Robin
American White Pelican
Black-and-white Warbler
Black-headed Whistling-Duck
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Blue-headed Vireo
Carolina Wren
Cedar Waxwing
Common Grackle
Common Yellowthroat
Cooper's Hawk
Double-crested Cormorant
Eastern Bluebird
Eastern Phoebe
Fish Crow
Glossy Ibis
Great Horned Owl
Hooded Merganser
Indigo Bunting
Mottled Duck
Northern Harrier
Osprey
Palm Warblers
Pine Warbler
Prairie Warbler
Red-winged Blackbird
Roseate Spoonbill
Sandhill Crane
Tricolored Heron
Wood Duck
Wood Stork
Yellow-rumped Warbler

Felts P reserve: Pick a pepper and pull

By Tom Heitzman, vice president

It is always a busy time at our Felts Audubon Preserve and this winter is no different. We had a nice turnout for the monthly workday in January. It was a beautiful day and a lot was accomplished. A group of us traversed the property pulling up little pepper tree seedlings. All of the large peppers have been removed but we still get many pepper and other invasive tree seedlings popping up. This is an easy job that just requires walking the property. The paths are kept mowed on a regular basis so it makes for easy walking. Thanks to Fred Allen who gets out on the tractor and keeps the paths passable. Can you help us pick a pepper this month?

Burn Report: Some of the Blue Bird houses that were taken down for the planned burn have been put back up while we wait for the right day to burn. We have been waiting for just the right weather conditions so we get a safe, successful result. But if the burn hasn’t been done by the end of February, we expect that it will have to be postponed until next winter because the Blue Birds are starting to nest and need their houses. In addition, the Purple Martin scouts are starting to look for places to nest and we want to put up boxes for them as well as the Blue Birds.

Trail maps and markers: We are working with a New College student and an Eagle Scout in making some trail maps and trail markers. Both these individuals are very excited to be working at Felts implementing these projects. The trail markers will allow visitors to know how far they may hike and also provide information on the property and habitats. Preparations are under way for a new butterfly garden that is going in next to the entrance to the bird blind. The planting is part of the TogetherGreen grant we were awarded this year. Keep an eye on its progress and come watch the planting during our Earth Day event on April 25. Another project with the TogetherGreen grant is a planting of small trees at our next workday on February 28 and we can always use more volunteers at that time.

Earth Day at Felts, on Saturday April 25, is coming up fast. We need volunteers the day of the event but also beforehand to get the property ready. So come out on our February 28 workday, or on the last Saturday in March, or both, to give us a hand. We have tasks for all skill levels. Hope to see you there!
Bird Watching Class has banner year

By Nancy and Bob Dean

For the first time since this annual Bird Watching course was started in January 2003, the maximum class size was achieved and several interested individuals had to be turned away. The 36 participants in the January 2009 course were drawn from the following communities: Anna Maria, Holmes Beach, Bradenton, Cortez, Ellenton, Lakewood Ranch, Palmetto, Parrish, Ruskin and Sarasota.

A total of 100 different bird species were seen by some or all participants during the two all-day field trips, which are included with the Manatee County Audubon Society course. On the January 24 field trip, we saw 68 different bird species at the following birding hotspots in Manatee County: Felts Audubon Preserve in Palmetto, Whitney Beach on Longboat Key, as well as Leffis Key and Coquina Beach on Anna Maria Island. On the January 31 field trip, participants saw many of the same birds plus some new birds for a total of 74 different species. On this last field trip, course members traveled to Ackerman Lake, the Celery Fields, Twin Lakes County Park, the pasture pond just east of St. Margaret’s Episcopal Church on State Road 72 and Myakka River State Park. All of these stops were in Sarasota County.

While each bird species is an exciting find, especially to someone viewing it for the first time, the most unusual finds were a Peregrine Falcon and two American Pipits seen near the church. Altogether 11 expert birders representing the Audubon Societies of both Manatee and Sarasota Counties as well as visitors from Washington, MI, assisted principal instructors Nancy and Bob Dean on the two field trips. With so many expert birders, more birds were sighted in 2009 than were seen during any prior course. Already, nine persons have reserved a spot for the 18-30 January 2010 course. For more information, contact Nancy Dean at 941-792-9235.

Welcome New Members:
Fran E. Baker
Judith Bien
Gary Breton
Wendy Davis and Stanley Rodak
Mary H. Hamilton
Eleanor and Rolph Huband
Gary and Karen Lewis
Smithy McGinnis
Lee Ann Pelea
Michael and Katharine Pepper
Mary E. Ranick
Lois Ruliffson
Janis Runte
Jessica M. Sakas
Elise M. Seese
Laura B. Tumolo
Margie A. Tumolo
Mary Anne Youngwood
Sandra M. Zabriskie
Alicia Elkins
Mary Spoutz
Margaret B. Safford
32 birders tour Mosaic phosphate fields and ponds

By Patty Petruff, trip coordinator

On a cold Saturday morning in early February, 32 of us participated in a field trip to Hardee County and the Mosaic phosphate mines. The trip started at the IMC-Agrico Peace River park where we met our guides. After searching the oaks adjacent to the entrance road for Warblers, Vireos and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, the group strolled along the boardwalk.

Although the swamp was quieter than in previous years, we saw a variety of birds such as Red-bellied Woodpeckers and Myrtle Warblers. We then drove back across US 17 and stopped to view an Eagle’s nest with Eaglets. Both adult birds were present. The next stops were area ponds where a variety of wading birds and ducks were spotted. An unusual sighting for a location this far east was a Brown Pelican in one of the ponds.

We then went up on the dams of the clay settling areas where the group got closer looks at Avocets, Black-crowned Night Herons, Grebes, Dowitchers, Stilt Sandpipers and a variety of ducks. During the day, two Great Horned Owl nests with Owls were seen. Ospreys on nests were also abundant. At one of the ponds, there was a beautiful flight of nine Roseate Spoonbills. Mosaic served lunch and made hats and other items available to the group. After lunch, there were a few more stops at other clay settling areas where some were lucky enough to see Pintails and Gadwalls. Overall, we saw and/or heard 87 species.

Members, please check your renewal date and your mailing label

Quite a few memberships have expired and not yet been renewed. We would hate to have to drop you from our mailing list. Annual membership is $15 and covers everyone in the household. If your mailing label is incorrect, please call me at 941-776-8424, see me at the next general meeting, or send a note to the Manatee County Audubon Society, PO Box 14450, Bradenton, FL 34280. Also please make sure you give me any address, phone number or e-mail changes whenever they occur. – Lucette Wombacher, Membership Chair

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