



The Night Heron

www.manateeaudubon.org
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We are committed to protecting the environment in our community, our state and our country.

Rake-in crew prepares new wildflower meadow at Felts. Page 2.

Join Hands Across the Sands to oppose drilling

By Barbara Singer, president

On Saturday February 13, citizens of Florida will have an opportunity to show their opposition to oil drilling as close as three to ten miles off our coast. This movement will be made of people from all walks of life and will cross political affiliations. This movement is not about politics; it is about protection of our shoreline, our tourism, our valuable properties and our way of life. Let us share our knowledge, energies and passion for protecting our waterways and beaches from the devastating effects of oil drilling.

Sierra Club, enviro organizations, citizens and businesses are standing up in a grassroots effort to protest offshore drilling and protect our beaches, waterways and tourist economy on Saturday February 13 from 1-2 p.m. EST at Manatee County Beach, Anna Maria Island. Please go to www.handsacrossthesand.org for more information and to see all the beaches that will be involved. This is a statewide protest and it's simple – just go to the beach and join hands. Wear black if you have it!

There will be flyovers and media on this event that will drive a statewide and national conversation about this important issue.

Charles Sobczak to present February 18 program



The speaker for Manatee Audubon's meeting on Thursday February 18 will be Sanibel Island author Charles Sobczak, who will talk about "Alligators, Sharks & Panthers: Deadly Encounters with Florida's Top Predator—Man." That is also the title of his non-fiction book. The meeting will begin at 7:30 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church of Palmetto, 330 11th Avenue West, Palmetto.

Supporters of this option should urge county commissioners to go forward

County has chance to expand Robinson Preserve

By Molly McCartney

Manatee County has a chance to acquire 200 acres adjacent to the popular 487-acre Robinson Preserve in northwestern Manatee if a financial arrangement can be worked out with the Robinson family members who own the land, according to Charlie Hunsicker, director of the Manatee County Department of Natural Resources. In his January 21 presentation to Manatee Audubon, Hunsicker said the Robinsons have signaled that they are so happy with the success of the preserve that they are interested in talking to county officials about ways that the county could buy the 200 adjacent acres.

Hunsicker said there is a limited time for the Manatee County Board of Commissioners to express interest in this opportunity and work out a financial plan to acquire the property since the Robinsons already have approval to proceed with the development of the 200 acres this spring and transform it into an 18-hole golf course and 20 single family homes. Manatee County purchased the original 487 acres for the preserve from the Robinson family for \$10 million at a time when its market value was nearly \$17 million. The county contributed \$4 million for the land purchase and obtained grants and other gifts to cover the balance.

In his talk, Hunsicker showed slides of Robinson Preserve as it exists now and the improvements that his department has made, bringing in waterways and taking other steps to restore the land to its natural condition and attract wildlife. The county has also built a series of trails, walks and rest stops. Another addition is a tower that visitors can climb to get a birdseye view of the surrounding landscape. Hunsicker said there are plans to add a camera to the top of the tower and connect the camera to the Internet so that anyone can see the view on a computer screen.

Citizens who want the county to try and acquire the 200 additional acres for Robinson Preserve should make their views known to the seven county commissioners as soon as possible. See page 3 for how to contact each of the commissioners.

Upcoming events on page 4

Look back at our history

By Don Bansen

Manatee Audubon received an award as a *Bradenton Herald* Community Club for a number of years during the late 1980s. The award was a high quality scrapbook with a brass plaque on the cover and sometimes with a special category such as "Environmental Improvement" stamped on the cover. Those scrapbooks are the source of much of the history of our club.

Americus (Meric) Woodward was president from 1988 to 1990 followed by June Boettcher (later June Harrington) for the years 1990 to 1992.

The county had six active Eagle nests at the time of the Christmas Bird Count in 1989.



MCAS member and teacher Rick Meyers helped Sugg Middle School students place Bluebird houses that they had built at several locations in north and eastern Manatee County.

In April 1990 two students from Lincoln Middle School won an essay contest sponsored by MCAS and each received a week at the Florida Division of Forestry Student Camp. They read their essays at Hendrick Auditorium at the State Fair Grounds.

Don Bansen, your historian, became president in 1992 and served for two years, followed by Rick Meyers for another two years.

Leffis Key was developed in 1992 by the county, with help from volunteers who planted marsh grass and later mangrove trees.



Volunteers prepare new wildflower meadow at Felts Preserve. Photo by Tom Heitzman

Rake-In crew prepares Felts for new wildflower meadow

By Lea Etchells

We put out a big plea for volunteers to come to Felts Preserve for a big "RAKE IN" on Sunday January 24. We had 12 hardy people show up with rakes of all descriptions. Everyone pitched in and we were able to rake the built up thatch from our new wildflower meadow. For those of you who may not know what we were doing, I will give a quick review. We received a grant from the Southwest Florida Water Management District to eradicate the St. Augustine grass, *Stenotaphrum secundatum*, a non-native species, and replace it with native Florida wildflowers.

Last fall we started the eradication and now we were left with a thick layer of thatch. We need "soil to seed" contact in order for the seeds to successfully germinate. So that was our task Sunday. We will finish Saturday January 30 on our regular scheduled work day and we will be seeding within a couple weeks.

Sunday January 24 was not a cool day and everyone worked into the hot afternoon sun. While we were working, we saw a Purple Martin scout fly over. We also saw some great birds during a break in the blind. Thanks to our volunteers – Smithy McGinnis, Susan Anderson, Al Semago, Ergun Baharoglu, Stephani Meister, Tom Heitzman, Roger and Jan Robson, Lucette Wombacaher, Fred Allen, Steve Black, Barb Singer and a special thanks to Bob and Nancy Dean who not only showed up and helped but, also came out to Felts during the week and cleaned litter from all three of the ditches along the roads, and filled feeders.



Rake-In Crew from left: Fred Allen, Roger Robson and Nancy Dean

Everglades Extravaganza

By Barbara Singer, president

On Friday morning, January 14, our 29 eager birders boarded vans for a three-day trip to Everglades National Park and other birding locations in the Miami area. Our first stop was in Sarasota County where we were treated to the spectacular event of watching a million Tree Swallows leave their roost for the day! After that we were off to various birding hot spots along U.S. 41 in the Everglades.



We stopped at Big Cypress Bend Boardwalk where we spent a few hours birding the 2000 foot boardwalk adding about 20 birds to our list, possibly the best being a Brown-headed Nuthatch. On to the other stops along U.S. 41 produced the best bird of the day – a Snail Kite (photo at left). We ended our day with dinner at the Miccosukee Indian Restaurant.

Saturday bright and early we were off to the 38-mile road that leads from the Ernest F. Coe Visitors Center to Flamingo. Our stops included a walk along the Anhinga Trail where a Purple Gallinule was spotted and we were treated to Anhinga babies in the nests. Other stops along the way were Paurotis Pond, Snake Bite Trail, Mrazek Pond, Eco Pond and the marina in Flamingo. It is hard to decide what was the best bird of the day since we saw American Avocets and an estimated 3,000 Willets.

On Sunday we were on the road bright and early to visit some of the Miami area birding hot spots. Our first stop of the day was at Mary Krome Park where we saw our first Ruby-throated Hummingbirds and a White-winged Dove. The next stop was Marsh Dump which is located next to Mt. Trashmore. Here we added a Green-winged Teal and an immature Bald Eagle. Our last stop of the day also brought us the best birds of the day: a male Painted Bunting along with two female Painted Buntings.

As we made our way home, we were all tired and weary but also excited about the new life birds we acquired and also the new friendships that made this a wonderful trip.



Birds clockwise from upper left: Snail Kite, Anhinga, Cormorant, Tri-colored Heron. Bottom left is a Green Heron. Birders at right are looking for warblers. Snail Kite photo by Paul Barsalou. Other photos by Lucette Wombacher.



If you support the chance for Manatee County to acquire 200 acres adjacent to Robinson Preserve, here's who to contact and how to reach them

Commissioner Larry Bustle
District One
(941) 745-3701
larry.bustle@mymanatee.org

Commissioner Gwen Brown
District Two
(941) 745-3700
gwen.brown@mymanatee.org

Commissioner John R. Chappie
District Three
(941) 745-3700
john.chappie@mymanatee.org

Commissioner Ron Getman
District Four
(941) 745-3713
ron.getman@mymanatee.org

Commissioner Donna Hayes
District Five
(941) 745-3703
donna.hayes@mymanatee.org

Commissioner Carol Whitmore
At Large
(941) 745-3700
carol.whitmore@mymanatee.org

Commissioner Joe McClash
At Large
(941) 748-4501
joe.mcclash@mymanatee.org

Letters to the commissioners should be mailed to them at P.O. Box 1000 Bradenton FL 34206-1000

Upcoming Events

Saturday 2/6

Open House Felts Preserve
8 a.m. - noon

Tuesday 2/9

Emerson Point two-hour walk with Lucette Wombacher. This is a joint activity of Manatee Audubon and Manatee Natural Resources Department. To reserve a spot, call 748-4501 ext 4605 or 776-8424.

Friday - Sunday 2/12-15

Great Backyard Bird Count

Birders of all ages count and record the number of individuals of each species that you see during your participation session. See GBBC website at www.birdcount.org for more information and to record your count. If you have questions about the website, call Lucette Wombacher 776-8424 or Barbara Singer at 922-4488, leave your name and number and they will call you back with answers.

Saturday-Sunday 2/13-14

Storm Treatment Area 5

Connie Zack, 758-2929, leads this two-day trip to Clewiston for a guided tour of the new Station 5, known as a top birding hot spot in Southwest Florida. Advance reservations necessary.

Thursday 2/18

Monthly meeting at 7:30 p.m.
First United Methodist Church
330 11th Avenue West, Palmetto

Wednesday 2/24

Myakka River State Park

Barbara Singer, 504-0228, leads this trip to Florida's largest and most diverse natural area, a 28,975-acre park with a wooden birdwalk, a platform by the dam and a canopy walk. Meet at 8:30 a.m. in the first parking lot on the right of Twin Lake Park. Exit I-75 at Clark Road (S.R. 72) go left (west) about 1/2 mile to entrance of Twin Lake Park.

Saturday 2/27

Work Day Felts Preserve
8 a.m. to noon

Saturday 3/6

Circle Bar B field trip
Carol Webster, 747-7295, leads trip to Circle B Bar Ranch in Lakeland. Depart Main Post Office at 7 a.m.



Manatee Audubon birders on the Lettuce Lake Boardwalk. Right is one Limpkin feeding near boardwalk.

Birders spot 63 species and visit Ybor City

By Nancy and Bob Dean, field trip leaders.

Thirty-one participants enjoyed spectacular bird watching on January 13 and sampled the cultural history of Ybor City, a Tampa, FL district. More birds were seen at Lettuce Lake County Park than trip leaders Nancy and Bob Dean can recall finding in a single outing over the past 23 years.



Birders along Cockroach Bay Road

After years of absence, two Limpkins were seen. Since one was spotted eating an Apple Snail, we surmise that this valued food source is again plentiful. Early morning cold apparently caused over a dozen Black-crowned and Yellow-crowned Night Herons to perch together on sun-drenched shrubs across from the Observation Tower. Other great spottings at this site were a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and a Common Yellowthroat. Myriads of Palm Warblers walked on Duck Weed covered water near the boardwalk, as did fewer numbers of Yellow-rumped Warblers.

Lunch at the famous Columbia Restaurant met all of our expectations. Touring the state-owned Ybor City Museum provided additional cultural insights as well as a good historical review of this restored company town, beginning with its inception shortly before the 20th Century until present day. Group size and time precluded a

visit to the authentic Cuban bakery, but we could not return home without visiting Cockroach Bay Road for its usual winter birds. Unfortunately, our target bird, the Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, was not seen. Great views of an adult male Harrier as well as a good assortment of ducks and lots of Killdeer were obtained. Altogether 63 species were spotted before this trip concluded at 5 p.m.

Welcome new members: Gayle C. Andrews, Nancy and Jim Barden, Diane and Stuart E. Benedict, Dinah Bradley, Lynda C. Campbell, Jeff R. Carlson, Yiwen Chow, Deane F. Corneil, Judie M. Ellis, Linda L. Gamber, Chris Garber, Wendell M. Graham, Jane Hamlin, Christine and Stephen Hoffman, Patricia L. Johannesen, Maria R. Molnar, Evan Mortimer, Marcia and Pomeroy Robinson, Mary Walsh and John Wuepper.

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