



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.

Prescribed burn at Felts produces new growth. See page 2.

Timing for dues has changed

By Lucette Wombacher, treasurer
As we have announced before, Manatee Audubon can no longer rely on our newsletter mailing labels to remind everyone when it is time to pay annual dues. That's because we have switched to an electronic delivery system for the newsletter. A few printed copies of a black-and-white newsletter are still being mailed to those who either have no way to receive the newsletter electronically or who have asked for a print copy. Most of our members now receive a color newsletter through email.

As a result of this change in newsletter delivery, MCAS now requests all members to pay their dues in January. Because this is a transition year, everyone who has made a payment since July 1, 2009, is current. Everyone else is due now. If you are in doubt as to whether you are current, please call Lucette Wombacher at 941-776-8424 or see her at the General Meeting. Annual dues are still \$15 per household and can be mailed to MCAS, P.O. Box 14550, Bradenton, FL 34280.

Welcome New Members

Lynda Ackroyd, John Buckholz, Kenneth and Charlene Cluley, Dale and Claudette Darling, Robert Ferraris, Michael Haney, John Hazard, Carrie Rainwater and Jerry Ulrikson.



David Williamson to present bird ID program at April 15 potluck meeting

Our own David Williamson will provide some fun background entertainment during the annual potluck this year, beginning at 6:30 p.m. Thursday April 15. Plan on doing some bird ID, but no binoculars or ID field guide will be needed. David will play the sounds of many of our local birds and migrants one at a time. You'll have 10 to 15 seconds to guess which ones they are by sound. Then he'll show a photo of the bird. The meeting will be at the First United Methodist Church, 330 11th Avenue West, Palmetto.

Felts Earth Day festival set for Saturday April 17

By Lea Etchells

Manatee County Audubon will be celebrating Earth Day on Saturday April 17 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Felts Audubon Preserve. We have been planning this festival for months and it is shaping up to be a great day. The founder of Earth Day was Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin. He wanted to put the environment into the political limelight. Senator Nelson first brought his ideas to President Kennedy in 1962 and the President was in total agreement. After eight years, Earth Day had its own day, April 22, 1970. Democrats, Republicans, rich and poor, and those from all walks of life came together and it eventually led to the creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the passage of the Clean Air Act and the Endangered Species Act. Senator Nelson was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest honor given to civilians in the United States for his role as Earth Day founder. Through the years it has become a worldwide event and continues to evolve with emphasis on global warming, recycling and clean energy.

We hope you will come and celebrate this special day with us. We will have many environmentally friendly vendors and exhibitors ready to educate and demonstrate ways to help protect our land, water, air and all the critters that depend on them to survive. A few of our vendors will introduce things such as a solar run oven, why you want to have bats in your neighborhood, how a Honda Insight Hybrid can improve your life, and how you can get that rain barrel you wanted put together and ready to go. As in the past we will also have nature walks, informative speakers and an opportunity for you to see some of our special bird friends like the Bluebirds, Purple Martins, both Painted and Indigo Buntings along with all or other special birds.

We have planned activities for kids from face painting to actually making their own birdhouse or feeder with the help of volunteers from the Home Depot "Kids Workshop." Mote Marine will be on site with their mobile marine display and touch tank so kids can actually get to touch some of our underwater friends. A folk music jam will begin at 12:30 p.m. The Grillmasters volunteers, compliments of Zirkelbach Construction, will be the chefs behind the wonderful barbeque smell that will fill the area. The barbeque is a fund raising event, so come with a BIG appetite and help us raise money for Felts.

Spring Break Camp Begins March 29 At Felts Preserve

By Karen Fraley

Around the Bend Nature Tours is working in partnership with Manatee Audubon and the Tampa Bay Estuary Program to prepare for Spring Break Camp at Felts Audubon Preserve on March 29 – April 2. As of this writing, a little more than a week before camp begins, there are still spaces available. We noticed this same trend last year – only 30 were registered the Friday before break, and by Monday we were full.



Each camper will have access to binoculars, which are on loan from Lincoln Middle School and the Junior Audubon Program. Three groups of campers will be separated by age and will have the opportunity to build a fort from natural materials. The forts will be on display at Felts Earth Day on April 17.

Last year we had 44 campers frolicking through Felts along with 10 leaders and an environmental art instructor. Fourteen campers qualified for a scholarship so that they could attend for free. The other 30 paid \$50 each, thanks to a grant from the Tampa Bay Estuary Program funded by the Tarpon Tag Florida License Plates. The same program applies this year.

Since there are no facilities at Felts, a tent, tables and folding chairs will be rented for the week along with an extra portable toilet. Water is available in three 7-gal thermoses, with one designated for hand washing and the others for drinking. Campers will bring their own lunch and learn the concept of zero food waste (eat it all or pack it out) and recycling.



Firemen conduct prescribed burn at Felts Audubon Preserve on March 5. Photo by Tom Heitzman.

Long-planned burn at Felts produces new growth

By Tom Heitzman

After months of planning and a few false alarms, the Florida Division of Forestry was able to conduct a burn at Felts Preserve. The conditions had to be just right for the burn to happen so our start date changed many times. Factors such as humidity, wind speed and direction, available manpower, permission of adjacent landowners and the time of year all had to be considered. On March 5 the timing was right and the burn was given a go ahead. Members of the North River Fire Department, Florida Division of Forestry and some of our own Audubon members gathered for a briefing. Around 10 a.m. the fire was started at the South end of the preserve and put out when it reached the middle of the property by the barn. Later in the day another burn was done on all sides of the South pond including under the mature slash pines on the West side. The entire process took just over seven hours to complete. A few firemen stayed around to put out any hotspots and make sure the fire was completely out.

Within two to three days there were already signs of new growth in the wildflower meadow and surrounding areas. Many of the wildflowers seemed not to be effected by the burn and were still green and thriving the very next day. With the burn, and subsequent rains, this year's wildflowers should be even more spectacular. During the burn the birds in the surrounding area seemed not to be effected at all. A pair of sand hill cranes causally walked in front of the fire line picking at bugs as the fire moved toward them. Behind the burn the cattle egrets feasted on whatever they could find. As our Felts Land Use Chair Lea Etchells joked, "the birds in front of the fire were eating sushi and those behind the fire were eating barbeque."

Fire is as much a part of the Florida ecosystem as our beautiful birds and beneficial in many ways. It cleans out the old growth while releasing nutrients back to the soil, stimulating new growth on the plants. By clearing out years of accumulated old growth as well as choking vines, new and existing plants can once again thrive, providing additional food and habitat for the birds.

On your next trip to Felts Preserve, check out the progress of the burned areas as the new plants burst forth. New growth on some of the burned plants was evident just days after the fire. Keep an eye out to see what comes up next.



Sandhill Cranes walk in front of fire line picking at bugs. Photo by Tom Heitzman.

Many thanks to Arlene Flisik and Connie Zack

By Barbara Singer, president

We are losing two of our most dedicated volunteers -- Arlene Flisik, who has kept us informed on conservation issues, and Connie Zack, who has organized many of our wonderful field trips. Now we have two big jobs to fill. If you are interested or know someone who might be, please let me know.

As many of you know, Arlene Flisik has decided to devote more attention to another very important issue in her life and that is the completion of her first

book. This has been an important endeavor in her life as long as I have known her, but it seems as though her volunteer work has always gotten in the way of its completion.

Arlene's resignation as our Vice President of Legislative and Public Affairs will definitely leave a void in MCAS and especially on the Board since she has kept us up to date on both local and national environmental and conservation issues. All of the board members owe Arlene extreme gratitude for the dedication she has shown to her jobs throughout these many years. Arlene, we thank you -- along with all the birds and land you have worked to save.

Connie Zack is another dedicated member who has decided to devote more time to other interests she has taken up since becoming a full time Floridian. For those of you who don't know, all of the wonderful field trips you have enjoyed over the years have been due to Connie's dedication. She has spent her summers lining up trip leaders and helping them plan their trip. She has at times also researched new locations when a trip leader was unsure of where to visit and found local guides to help, making sure we saw the best of the sites.

Along with many others, I want to truly thank you, Connie, for your dedication and for helping make my "life list" what it is today.



Arlene Flisik, left, and Connie Zack, right

Bad Waters

By Arlene Flisik, vice president

Long ago the federal government enacted the Clean Water Act. Implementation was up to the states. The powers in Tallahassee -- agriculture and industry -- didn't want to change, so instead of adopting scientific numerical standards for its waters, Florida adopted a narrative that nutrient loads couldn't cause a biological "imbalance" -- without defining what was meant by "imbalance." This made the rule unenforceable, which they desired.

Municipal water treatment plants improved their processes to some degree (ours are quite good) but the nutrient load in the waters kept rising. Two years ago, the Department of Environmental Protection found that 1,000 miles of the state's rivers and streams, and 900 square miles of estuaries were contaminated by sewage, fertilizer or manure. These are health risks, prevent swimming or harvesting shellfish at times, can result in massive fish kills, are linked to red tide and algae, undermine tourism, and can deflate waterfront land values.

Conservationists sued and the state (supported by the Florida Department of Agriculture, South Florida Water Management District, the phosphate industry, Sewage Utilities Councils, etc.) lost. The court has approved a Consent Decree for the Environmental Protection Agency to finalize numerical standards starting this October.

EPA will have a hearing in Tampa, approximately April 14. At previous hearings, the usual opponents came out in droves. Average citizens didn't. That can't continue! Our opinions count, but only if we make them known. That means appear! Speak a couple words! Or send comments before April 28.

Let me know what you're willing to do. You can reach me at 746-1991 and I'll try to help (field trip with Sierra Club? Bus?)

Junior Auduboners find a Damselfly



By Steve Black, vice president

Junior Auduboners look for insects. Red-shouldered Hawk, top left.

The Junior Audubon group met once again at Felts on March 6. This time we studied from the Audubon Adventurers Dragonflies and Damselflies. As usual, we adults learned as much as the students. For example, these creatures have been around for about 300 million years, and the dragonfly can eat up to 300 mosquitoes a day. We then went out looking for these magnificent insects, and even though it was a chilly day, our eight Junior Auduboners managed to find a Damselfly. They also saw the Painted Buntings from the bird blind and a Red-shouldered Hawk on a telephone pole. The hawks are long-time residents at Felts Preserve and often raise their young in the pine trees on the property. Thanks to Lucette Wombacher for her photographs shown above.



Damselfly

Upcoming Events

Saturday 4/3

Open House Felts Preserve
8 a.m. - noon

Saturday 4/10

Special Work Day Felts Preserve
to get ready for Earth Day
8 a.m. to noon

Tuesday 4/13

Emerson Point two-hour walk with
Lucette Wombacher. Final joint bird
walk of the season with Manatee Audu-
bon and Manatee Natural Resources
Department. Meet at Welcome Center at
Emerson Preserve at 8:30 a.m.

To reserve a spot,
call the county at 748-4501 ext 4605
or Lucette Wombacher at 776-8424.
"We saw 30 species on our March 9
walk," Lucette reports.

Thursday 4/15

Monthly meeting at 6:30 p.m.
Annual potluck and
installation of officers.
Special program on birds by
David Williamson.

Bring a dish to share and your own
plate, cup and utensils.

First United Methodist Church
330 11th Avenue West, Palmetto

Saturday 4/17

9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Earth Day Festival at Felts Preserve
Free admission

Mote Marine Mobile Aquarium
Folk music jam at 12:30 p.m.

Kids crafts, guided nature walk, wild
bird exhibits, native plant sale,
barbecue and drinks for sale.

Speakers to discuss bats,
backyard birding
and native planting
for birdes and butterflies.

Sunday 4/18

Field trip to Fort De Soto Park
for the spring migration.

Steve Black, 376-0110, coordinator.
Depart Main Post Office at 8 a.m.

Saturday 5/1

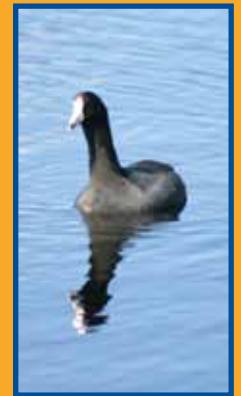
Open House Felts Preserve
8 a.m. - noon

Win a stay at Rancho Naturalist in Costa Rica

Our member Barry Rossheim is the Zoology teacher at Venice High School and its Zoology Club is auctioning a three-night stay for two persons. For a bird lover, Rancho Naturalist is not to be missed. For additional information, contact Barry at 941-485-1328 or nethoppers@msn.com. All proceeds will be donated to ASANA to help save the Rain Forest in Costa Rica.



From left, American Bittern and Sora at Circle B Bar Reserve. American Coot, below. Birders look for birds, bottom. Photos by Lucette Wombacher.



32 birders visit Circle B Bar Reserve

By Carol Webster, trip leader

The field trip to Circle B Bar Reserve in Polk County was a great success on March 10, which was a beautiful sunny day. Thirty-two birders attended. A few were visitors but most were Audubon members. Circle B-Bar Reserve is located on the Northwest shore of Lake Hancock. We all enjoyed the unique Exhibit Hall before starting our hike and tram ride.

Our volunteer team leader, Steve, entertained us with poetry and a detailed history of the old ranch and surroundings. Total bird count was 63. Highlights of the day were an American Golden Plover, a Sora and an American Bittern out in the open and very visible.



Bird ID Class is vital outreach effort

By Nancy and Bob Dean, principal instructors

Again, the MCAS Beginning Bird Watching Course celebrated another record-breaking year, enrolling 38 participants. Because so many Manatee County Audubon Society members talk-up this course, excitement generates an increasing stream of enrollees. Most course participants cite the two all-day field trips as their favorite part of the course. This accolade is a direct result of the help students receive from the many volunteer field instructors, who do their best to ensure that everyone has binocular views of sighted birds and then verbally reinforce key identifying characteristics. Other MCAS members help with enrolling and welcoming the new members, generated by the course MCAS membership requirement. This followup helps to achieve the goal of obtaining as many active new members as possible each time the course is offered. We are proud that so many of you have willingly helped us make this course a vital part of MCAS community outreach efforts. Thank you.

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