



# 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.*

## Ron Mayberry to speak on February 17



*Above is the Booted Racket-Tail hummingbird photographed by Ron Mayberry in Ecuador.*

*Renowned photographer, birder and MCAS member Ron Mayberry will speak at the Thursday February 17 meeting of Manatee County Audubon Society. Ron will talk about his trip to the remote regions of Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands. The meeting begins at 7:30 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church of Palmetto, 330 11th Avenue West, Palmetto.*

## Audubon offers scholarships

By Bunny Schneider

Manatee County Audubon Society is offering two \$1,000 scholarships to college-bound high school students who plan to study environmental science, biology or another environmentally related field at the college level with the intention of pursuing the protection of birds, wildlife and the environment as a career. Applications are available on line at [www.ManateeAudubon.org](http://www.ManateeAudubon.org). Submit completed applications to Manatee County Audubon Society, PO Box 14550, Bradenton, FL 34280-4550. Applications will be reviewed on the basis of academic excellence, outstanding character, citizenship and a demonstrated interest in the environment and wildlife. Deadline for applications is April 1.

Scholarship Chair is Bunny Schneider of the Manatee County Audubon Society. Phone 792-1794 or [JBRabbits@aol.com](mailto:JBRabbits@aol.com)

### April Pot Luck Reminder

*Mark your calendar now for the April 21 annual potluck and officer installation meeting of the Manatee County Audubon Society, says hospitality chair Patti Clauser. "We meet an hour earlier, at 6:30 p.m., and everyone is to bring a dish to share and their own place settings," she says.*

### President's Letter from Barbara Singer

## Where have all the birds gone?

On New Year's Eve, about 5,000 blackbirds died in Arkansas after fireworks scared them from their roost and they collided with houses, mailboxes, and possibly each other as they flew about disoriented in the dark. The incident sparked a flurry of media coverage. But it's the constant, chronic loss of bird-life because of habitat destruction and other causes that should really be headline news.

Ever since the blackbirds fell from the Arkansas sky, the Cornell Lab has continued to receive numerous inquiries from the media and the concerned public about the significance of that event and other reports of dead birds at locations around the world. These isolated events, although dramatic, are not highly unusual in frequency or scale. Within the United States, for example, the U.S. Geological Survey has recorded 188 events during the past 10 years involving more than 1,000 birds per incident -- about 18 events per year on average, or more than one per month, attributed to disease and other causes. Should we be worried about an "aflockalypse?" Yes, but not about the media coverage focusing on isolated events that affect only a few hundred or so. It's the constant, chronic losses from habitat destruction and other causes that should truly concern us. Consider that 100 million birds are estimated to die from window collisions in the United States alone each year. That's more than 270,000 per day on average. Cats are estimated to kill another 100 million per year. And that's just the tip of the iceberg. Habitat loss and degradation are the largest causes of massive declines in the numbers of birds.

Although we cannot witness these declines on a given day, citizen-science participants have contributed decades of data that point to truly alarming declines. Don't underestimate the power of the bird watchers to "witness" and document the large-scale declines that might otherwise go undetected until it's too late. With your help, the Cornell Lab and Audubon are working hard to monitor bird species and address the root causes of decline.

How can you help? By participating in various bird recording projects such as the Annual Christmas Bird Count, Project Feeder Watch, or the Annual Great Backyard Bird Count. Go to [www.birds.cornell.edu](http://www.birds.cornell.edu) for how you can help.

Portions of this article obtained from Cornell Lab of Ornithology

### *January Donors*

Sara Werner  
Charles and Judy Warner  
Janet Snyder  
Florence Jerome  
Francine Slack



Lesser Scaup. Photo by David Williamson

## 80 volunteers helped count birds at Christmas

### Bradenton Circle teams:

- Barbara Singer, Steve Black, Carolyn Primus, Barb Covey, Martha Staub.
- Connie Zack, Lucette Wombacher, Keith Gerber.
- Lynn Jakubowicz, Barry Rossheim, Valerie Ponzo, Mary Heinlen
- Jack Schneider, Bunny Schneider, Lea Etchells, Jean Turner, Ruth Rowland.
- Carol Webster, Sue Darovec, John Darovec, Arlene Flisik, Marty Young, Posey Havens.
- Karen Jensen, James Larson, Bill Mies, John van Zandt.
- Rick Greenspun, Kathryn Young.
- Mike Barnes, Nancy Barnes, Sue Dickie, Lucy Pace.
- Mike Corso, Carol Brighan, Al Richardson, Pat Lantz, Lee Zerkel, Rayna Antonelli.
- Tom Heitzman, Richard Beaupre, Roger Robson, Jan Robson, Margaret Hartzler, Don Benson, Bobbie Benson, Smithy McGinnis.
- David Williamson, Daniel Somodi, Stasia Lehmann, Daniel Somodi Jr.
- John Ginaven, Stu Wilson, Peter Rice, David Manchester.
- Jeff Fischer.

### Anna Maria Island

- Mark Hopey, Lynn Brandon, Kathryn Gunther, Lucy Pace, Sue Dickie, Lynn Jakubowicz, Valerie Ponzo, Mary Heinlen, Marilyn Noah-McGinnis, Smithy McGinnis, Rick Greenspun, Kathryn Young, Dick Ware, John Ruckdeschel, Mike Barnes, Gary Hartzler, Margaret Hartzler, Barbara Barstow, John Ginaven, Dick Ferren, Bob Pawling, Jane Pawling, John van Zandt.

## Birds showed up for Christmas Bird Count

By David Williamson, CBC chair

As I always like to say, we do not use individual count data to try to determine how the bird populations are trending. It takes many years of data to make those kinds of judgments. Additionally, we can't use only one geographic area to make determinations about the health of species that are found in so many other areas as well. The weather could have been a significant factor in us seeing more of some species and less of others. That said, here is a summary of the 2010 Christmas Bird Count in Manatee County.

### Bradenton Circle count

We had 56 volunteers for the Bradenton Circle count - the most we've ever had - on Saturday December 18. The weather was a little cool and rainy, but overall the birds showed up. We counted over 26,298 individual birds, which is about average over the last several years, and 132 species, which is excellent. Most ever. Here's a summary of what we found:

- It was a great year for ducks overall. Rick Greenspun and Kathryn Young saw the first Gadwall seen since 2002. Northern Shovelers more than doubled this year. Up to 75 Ring-necked Duck seen. Lesser Scaup up to 772, from just 2 last year.
- Cormorants - most ever at 1,119
- Both ibis species numbers are just half what they were last year
- John Ginaven's group saw the first Clapper Rail since 1989. His group toured Robinson Preserve.
- Purple Gallinule was seen for the first time in 5 years.
- Mourning Doves are way up. 2,158.
- Unverified report of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds would be the first ever for the count.
- Karen Jensen's group found a Hairy Woodpecker. They were able to compare it to a Downy Woodpecker on the same tree which is almost the only way to be sure since they are so similar and they are becoming extremely rare.
- Birds conspicuously absent: Green-winged Teal, Short-billed Dowitcher, Barred Owls, usually seen at Mansion Memorial Cemetery in Ellenton didn't show after being called twice! That's a Barred Owl in my photo at right.



### Gulf Circle (Anna Maria Island) count

The 29th consecutive Gulf Circle count on Anna Maria Island was held on Tuesday December 28, with the help of 24 volunteers who counted more than 7250 individual birds, which is slightly down from the last 2 counts, and 96 species which is excellent. Last year we had 100, but 96 is the second highest number of species we have seen on the count before. Here are highlights of the count:

- 1 new species for the count - 2 Hermit Thrushes
- A pair of the very uncommon Orange-crowned Warbler was seen. One on Leffis Key and another in the Village on Longboat Key.
- 12 Northern Pintail ducks were seen on Perico Island. These were only seen once before in 2007 and only 4 were seen then The largest number of Red-breasted Mergansers seen (350) were counted. This is double the number from last year.
- 64 Ospreys were seen. This is the most in any count by more than 20 individuals
- The number of invasive House Sparrows is up to its highest levels ever recorded. We have never before counted more than 50 individuals and this year we saw 136 total. These birds displace our native species by killing the young of cavity-nesting birds that take up residence nearby.
- No particular birds were noticeably absent from the count this year that are usually expected.

## Bird of the Month

# Roseate Spoonbill is a favorite local bird

By Dick Comeau, Field Trip Chair

The Roseate Spoonbill is one of our favorite local birds seen in many of our own coastal areas. I have seen them even at our own Felts Preserve, which is somewhat inland. When you see this large pink bird both wading and sweeping its spoon-shaped bill from side to side when feeding or even in flight it is a very dramatic bird. There is nothing like a flock of Spoonbills in flight against a bluish sky or at sunset coming in to roost for the night to make you appreciate these local residents.

*This Bird of the Month article is the latest in a series by Dick Comeau, our field trip chair.*



*Roseate Spoonbill*

Identification of the Roseate Spoonbill is pretty straight forward with its pink coloration and spatula-shaped bill. Probably the only other bird that might be confused with the Roseate Spoonbill is the Greater Flamingo. Upon closer inspection you may notice blood red on the Spoonbill's shoulders depending on its stage of breeding plumage. The head is bald with a greenish gray tone. The tail, if visible, is often orange in color. I recently observed the African Spoonbill in Kenya and it doesn't compare at all to our local Roseate Spoonbills.

The Roseate Spoonbill is related to our Wood Stork and Ibises but certainly stands out in comparison. It is definitely a Florida resident but ranges along the both coasts even extending at times all the way to coastal Louisiana. We are so lucky to have such a beautiful representative of our avian world.

## Field trip "delightful" in spite of cold

By Nancy and Bob Dean

Again this year, eight hardy birdwatchers from our club rose from warm beds for this near-freezing but productive field trip. Altogether, 70 species were seen including a lowly House Sparrow checking out a parking lot for bits of food. As in 2010, many Roseate Spoonbills, Limpkins and both species of Night Herons (immature and adult) were seen at Lettuce Lake County Park. We were most thrilled by a male Common Yellowthroat that fed for about five minutes along the shoreline near the covered part of the boardwalk. Extraordinary photos were taken. Later, eating at the historic Columbia Restaurant in Ybor City mirrored last year's great experience and information gained touring the Ybor City State Museum immersed us in local history and culture. Like Lettuce Lake, Cockroach Bay Road didn't disappoint. No Scissortails, but many ducks and waders, plus grand views of a Reddish Egret, whose dull juvenile plumage made it difficult to identify, especially since the characteristic foraging dance was not evident as we drove by his Mangrove nook. Size, shape, location and the very lack of color pattern led to a quick ID. The small group contained two novice and six experienced birders, which along with the large numbers of birds and many wonderful views generated much excitement. With warm coats, hats and gloves, the sunny, but cold day was delightful.

## Walking through Emerson Point Preserve

By Lucette Wombacher

The weather for the Emerson Point Preserve walk on January 11 was much better than last month. We had a total of twenty people on our walk. Plus two more joined us the last half hour. We saw 34 different species this time, along with lots of squirrels. Most of the group called it a day after we walked the North Restoration Trail loop. Those who stayed another 45 minutes were treated to great views of Yellow-crowned Night Herons at the Terra Ceia Trail, and a Roseate Spoonbill feeding on the near shore of the big pond. With such a large group, not everyone saw every bird, but everyone got a good look at the Belted Kingfishers, since we saw several.

# Great Backyard Bird Count is February 18-21

By Barbara Singer, president

The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent.

Anyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds.

Participants count birds anywhere for as little or as long as they wish during the four-day period. They tally the highest number of birds of each species seen together at any one time. To report their counts, they fill out an online checklist at: <http://birdsource.org/gbbc>

As the count progresses, anyone with Internet access can explore what is being reported from their own towns or anywhere in the United States and Canada. They can also see how this year's numbers compare with those from previous years.

If you do not have computer access you can still help. List the species, how many, your observation location, your name and phone number and mail the information to: Barbara Singer, 4458 Coco Ridge Cr., Sarasota, FL 34233. I will enter your data if received by February 25.

## Welcome new members

Gary Plumb  
Debra Hutchinson  
Chuck and Liz Kercher  
Dan and Donna McCombs  
Don and Phyllis Pelly  
Donna Harrison and Cherly Webb  
Martha Hollis  
Jim Hogie



## Upcoming Events

### Wednesday 2/2

Robinson Preserve.  
Bob and Mary Kelly, 758-9796. See waterbirds and migrants. Meet at 8 a.m. at the preserve, 1709 99th Street NW, Bradenton.

### Saturday 2/5

Open House Felts Preserve  
8 a.m. to noon

### Tuesday 2/8

Emerson Point Palmetto  
Two-hour walk with Lucette Wombacher, 776-8424, and Manatee's Natural Resources Department. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the Welcome Center at Emerson Point.

### Wednesday 2/9

Cockroach Bay Aquatic Preserve. Carol Webster, 747-7295. Reservation required. Presentation on bird banding and then watch as birds are caught, banded and released. Meet 7:30 a.m. at southwest corner of Walmart parking lot, 508 U.S. 301 at 10th Street East, Palmetto.

### Saturday 2/12

Phosphate Mines Polk County. Barbara Singer, 504-0228. Reservation required. Privately-guided tour of reclamation ponds near Lakeland and rare chance to see Short-tailed Hawks, wintering warblers and shorebirds. Meet at 7 a.m. at Cracker Barrel, S.R. 64 and I-75. Lunch will be free but brings snacks and drinks for all-day outing.

### Thursday 2/17

General Meeting  
Manatee Audubon Society.  
7:30 p.m.  
First United Methodist Church of Palmetto, 330 11th Ave. W. Palmetto. Renowned photographer, birder and MCAS member Ron Mayberry will tell about his trip to Ecuador and Galapagos Islands.



*Fifteen people participated in the January 8 field trip to Myakka River State Park. The weather was very cooperative and we were treated to a total of 63 species. The first species (Black-bellied Whistling Ducks) were found in a pond as we left the Lowes' parking lot. By extending the trip (2.5 miles east of the north gate on Clay Gully Road) after lunch, we spotted a pair of Crested Caracaras. Report and photo from trip leaders Mike and Nancy Barnes.*

## Birders spot 85 species on Gainesville trip

*By Lucette Wombacher*

**Nine members** traveled to Gainesville on January 14-16. The mornings were quite cold, but the afternoons were sunny and very comfortable. We visited Paynes Prairie State Park, Morningside Nature Center and several other hot spots. We saw 85 species including hundreds of Sandhill Cranes, a few Whooping Cranes, both white and blue Snow Geese, and hundreds of American Coots. Several Wilson's Snipes and American Bitterns were out in the open and very close. We also spotted quite a bit of other wildlife including Bison, River Otter, deer and lots of alligators. The University of Florida Butterfly Rainforest was a huge hit with everyone. So was the evening hospitality hour at the Cabot Lodge Motel



## Junior Auduboners study "Plants Rule"

*By Steve Black*

**Eight Junior Auduboners** attended our January 15 meeting at Felts Audubon Preserve. We had Reid and Brody Kauffman, James and Mathew Press, Kayliana and Grayson McMillan, and Eric and Nicholas Martinez, who joined us for the first time. Eric, who is seven years old, is an amazing birder.

**The Audubon Adventures** lesson was "Plants Rule." We learned the benefits of native plants. As a project, we planted six Long Leaf Pines. We were able to get the water from the Rain Barrels to water the plants, as you can see in the photo at right. At the Bird Blind, we were entertained by all the birds at the feeders. We got great views of the Painted Buntings and Indigo Buntings as well as many other wonderful birds.



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