



The Night Heron

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

Felts Nature Day set For April 2

By Barbara Singer, president

This year our spring event will be Felts Nature Day on Saturday April 2 and it is going to take on a truly educational theme. The action runs from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. and is open free to all.

We are sponsoring free seminars that will cover the following topics:

- Beginning Bird Watching
- Photographing Wildlife
- Backyard Design to attract birds and butterflies.

Seminars will last about an hour and provide take-home material. Seminar sizes will be limited so see next month's newsletter for a seminar schedule.

We will also have learning activities for children, a Native Plant sale and scheduled walks through Felts. Various environmental groups will offer material. Food and drinks will be available.

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.



Bob Montanaro to speak March 17

Treasure Hammock Ranch researcher Bob Montanaro will be our speaker at the Thursday March 17 meeting of Manatee County Audubon Society. He will discuss how nature and a working ranch can work together. The meeting begins at 7:30 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church of Palmetto, 330 11th Avenue West, Palmetto.

President's Letter from Barbara Singer

As Spring approaches...

The excitement is in the air! Local birders are starting to report the return of some migrants. Amidst all this excitement, let's not forget our manners.

Do we pish? Pishing involves making a sound that resembles a bird's alarm or scolding call, by using one's lips to coax the bird out of hiding. The inquisitive bird will then reveal himself to find out who is in his territory. The noise that is made sounds like pish, pish, pish in rapid succession, then chit, chit, chit. I have heard this done on field trips and honestly thought it was another bird rather than a human making the sound.

New technology has elevated the art of pishing. You can now download an App to your electronic gadgets that includes a complete set of bird identification pictures, songs and calls. Information can be accessed in the field, and songs and calls played over the speakers.

More and more people are using this technology to coax birds out of hiding. There is concern, as noted in David Sibley's book, "Sibley's Birding Basics," that this technology, if used too often, might have a detrimental affect on a species. One should never use it during mating, nesting or migratory recovery as this may put undo stress on a bird during these fragile times.

Pishing whether using one's voice or recordings can be a very useful tool for the birder but should be used only in moderation.

Another useful but also dangerous tool is a laser pointer. This can be used by individuals to help others spot a bird. Never, never, never put the laser pointer directly on the bird. Only use the pointer to draw attention to a general area.

So with our manners in check, let's go out and enjoy what Mother Nature has given us.

February Donors

- Bob and Nancy Dean
Lea Etchells
Bob Flatt
John Buckholz
Dee Trowbridge
Martha Hollis
Marjorie Rennie
Shirley McGinnis
Shawna and Rob Malecki

Thanks to Felts hosts

By Carol Webster

In spite of the New Year holiday, Winona and David Myers came out to host about 22 visitors. It was a beautiful 68 degree, sunny day until about 11 a.m. when the wind came up to between 15 and 20 miles per hour. Visitors arrived rather late that day so Winona and David spotted many species before the visitors arrived. Birds seen that day included the Eagle, eight White Pelicans, Pileated, Red-bellied and Red-headed woodpeckers.

On February 5, Patti and Barry Clauser hosted over 50 visitors.

Here is the Clausers' report:

Our 50 visitors included a Cub Scout Troop working on a hiking badge and a bird watching badge. We also had a Girl Scout, taking pictures toward her photography badge. They were interested in the Junior Audubon club and also our nature day in April.

We had a couple who spent the entire four hours at Felts that morning and were rewarded with spotting a Ruby-crowned Kinglet.



Ruby-crowned Kinglet

Fred Allen counted 17 Savannah Sparrows, and all together we counted 42 different species.

Not bad for a day that was overcast and windy. We collected \$51 in donations, and had a few people interested in coming to our monthly meetings. We handed out many brochures and met a lot of great birders from all over the country.

Environmental mowing helps at Felts

By Lea Etchells

If you have visited Felts Audubon Preserve in the last few weeks, you will have noticed that we have had some environmental mowing done to different areas of the property. This kind of mowing is necessary periodically to open and expose new areas to sunlight. It promotes indigenous plant species to grow and at the same time helps to eliminate invasive plant species. It mimics the occasional fires that Florida evolved with and restores native habitat and helps to accommodate the different needs of different birds and butterflies. An example of that is our Eastern Bluebird. These birds need wide open spaces in order to thrive, while the Savannah Sparrow needs lots of cover from vegetation in order to hide and find food. We have both of these species at Felts and so we try to keep both of them happy. It is a balancing act to be sure.



Right now the Savannah Sparrows can be spotted on the east side of Felts from the trail that runs north to south along the top of the berm. They love the habitat there and have been spotted daily for quite some time. The Eastern Bluebirds can be seen sitting on top of the bluebird houses in the area south of the entry drive to Felts and in the open field in the south pasture area. The Sandhill Cranes also love the open areas and the owls are able to spot mice at night in the open fields.



*Eastern Bluebird, top
Savannah Sparrow, bottom*

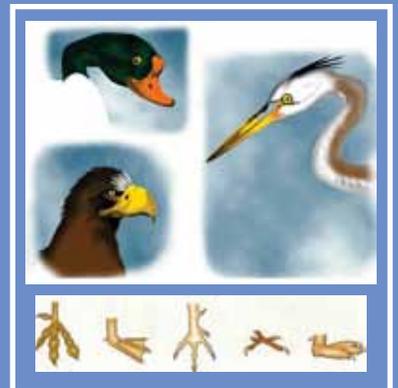
Other bird species that have been regular visitors in the last month, according to Fred Allen, are Indigo Buntings, Painted Buntings, Kestrels, and Red-shouldered Hawks. On February 3 someone spotted a Great Horned Owl. The Purple Martin scouts are due at Felts any day now and hopefully by the time you read this they will have arrived. Fred also reports that a few Monarch butterflies have been spotted along the trails.

Thanks to our dedicated Felts workers, Roger Robson and Ron Cayer, we now have an outdoor storage area for bird seed. The storage bins give us more room in the Bird Blind and also make it easier to fill the feeders. If you are at Felts and see that a feeder is in need of seed, feel free to access the bins that are located outside at the SE corner of the Bird Blind. Please verify the seed type prior to filling a feeder by looking at the pictures on top of the seed cans.

Junior Audubon studies bird feet and beaks

By Steve Black

Our Junior Audubon group met February 19 at the Felts Audubon Preserve. In attendance were James Press, Nicholas and Eric Martinez, and Kayla Hickey. All the kids had parents with them. The topic was "wild about birds," which gave a history of John James Audubon. The lesson discussed how bird feet and beaks are adapted to the food they eat. We went to the Bird Blind to observe what we had studied. We concluded by walking around the property as a way to review anything we had previously studied. Our next lesson will be about bees, and I am working to have a bee keeper bring some bees to observe.



Bird of the Month**Pileated Woodpecker
Drums for a reason**

By Dick Comeau, Field Trip Chair

The Pileated Woodpecker, pronounced either “Pill-ee-ated or Pile-ee-ated” for those who want to be linguistically correct is our largest North American woodpecker (can’t count the supposedly extinct Ivory-billed Woodpecker). It’s a black, crow-sized woodpecker with a flaming red crest. The female has a blackish forehead and lacks the red mustache. If you see a large black crow-like bird with white flashes in the wings fly, take notice because it may be a Pileated Woodpecker.

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



Pileated Woodpecker

Pileated Woodpeckers eat insects, fruits, and nuts. A major part of its diet consists of carpenter ants and beetle grubs. It uses its sharp bill to pry off bark in order to expose carpenter ant colonies. It uses its long sticky barbed tongue to poke into the holes and drag out the ants. The rectangular holes (5-6”) they excavate in trees is diagnostic for the Pileated. They can be used for nesting or roosting purposes. The inside of the nest cavity can be anywhere from 10 to 24 inches deep. Old Pileated nest cavities are used by many other birds (Screech Owls, for example) and other animals to also nest or to find shelter when necessary.

When out in the woods here in Florida you can sometimes hear the loud hammering sound of Pileated Woodpeckers as the sound carries a long ways. They drum to attract mates and to establish the boundaries of their territory and warn other males away. We are very lucky to have such dramatic representatives of the bird world in our area.

Birders brave cold and get big rewards

By Barbara Singer

Wednesday February 9 -- 26 birders braved the cold for an experience to remember. We headed out to the Cockroach Bay Aquatic Preserve for some excellent birding and a bird banding demonstration. At the preserve we were treated to many migratory birds and ducks along with a life bird for many, a pair of American Black Ducks. The bird banding demonstration was sponsored in part by Quest Ecology, which is helping to fund the banding research at the Preserve. We observed five birds being measured, weighed and banded before release back to nature. What a Day! Two life experiences for most.

Saturday February 12 was a day of many birds. Two Junior Audubon birders and 35 adult birders saw thousands of birds that call the reclaimed Phosphate Mines home. In all we had 76 species on our trip with a life bird for many, a Wilson’s Phalarope.



*Yellow-rumped Warbler
Photo by Bob Flatt*

Walking through Emerson Point Preserve

By Lucette Wombacher

Fourteen of us walked the South Restoration and Terra Ceia Trails at Emerson Point Preserve on Tuesday February 8. It was cool and windy, but occasionally the sun peeked through enough to get the warblers moving. Bob Wombacher spotted two Bald Eagles perched at a distance and everyone had a good look before they flew off. We also were treated to close-up views of a mature and an immature Yellow-crowned Night Heron. Altogether we saw 23 different species.

**Board of Directors
Election
will be March 17**

By Bunny Schneider

The election for members of the Manatee County Audubon Society Board of Directors will be March 17.

Jim Stephenson and Bob Flatt have been nominated to join the board.

The Nominating Committee included Bunny Schneider, Lucette Wombacher and Nancy Keegan.

Welcome new members

Marjorie Coon
Harry E. Nicholson
David and Carole Munro
Glenn and Mary Zeiders
Kathy Boutwell
Lou and Audrey Pomrenke Jr.
Doris Kessell
Phil and Diana Stone

New Members from birding class:

Christina and Seth Pommer
Barbara H. Alexander
Gretchen Castner
Linda Keller
Barbara J. Kice
Marilyn Lane
Barbara A. Lintott
Beth Macaulay
Marybeth Packard
Sue Paschall
Phillip V. Price
Priscilla A. Ridall
Karen Saulnier
Pat T. Shelton
Margaret S. (Peggy) Steinfurth
Kathy E. Storm
Joanna Trescott
Tessie and Don Wallace
Bea E. Moran
Marlene Yanelli

Members who have rejoined:

Lloyd and Mary Parker
Liz Briede
Pat Bohlinger

Upcoming Events

Wednesday 3/2

Circle B Bar. Connie Zack, 759-2929. Reservation required. Ride tram through the reserve and walk the trails. Meet 7 a.m. at Cracker Barrel, SR 64 at I-75

Saturday 3/5

Open House Felts Preserve 8 a.m. to noon

Tuesday 3/8

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.

Friday-Saturday 3/18-19

Audubon Academy, Paramount Plaza, Gainesville

Thursday 3-17

7:30 p.m. General Meeting Manatee Audubon Society First United Methodist Church 330 11th Avenue West, Palmetto. Speaker will be Treasure Hammock researcher Bob Montanaro.

Sunday 3-20

Felts Preserve. Bob and Nancy Dean, 792-9235. Walk through the preserve to see spring migration birds. Meet at 8 a.m. at the preserve, 4600 24th Avenue East, Palmetto.

Thursday 3/24

Urfer Park. Barbara Singer, 504-0228. Check out Sarasota's newest birdy park. Meet at 8 a.m. at Lowe's parking lot, I-75 and north side SR 70.

Saturday 3/26

Work day Felts Preserve 8 - 12 noon

Tuesday 3/29

Shamrock Park and Venice Rookery. Barry and Patti Clauser, 776-9063. Meet 7 a.m. at Cracker Barrel, SR 64 at I-75.

Venice Birders have high praise for Felts



Members of the Venice Area Birding Association are from the Englewood, Rotonda, Venice, and Nokomis area. Photos by John Whitehead.

By Abbie Banks, Venice Area Birding Association

February 15 -- We drove through the early morning pea soup fog to meet with other members of Venice Area Birding Association. We were car pooling and would be going to Felts Audubon Preserve. Rhea Guertin and Ron Salisbury were the leaders for this trip. Otis Felts left this 30-acre property in Palmetto, Florida, to Manatee Audubon Society because he hoped that the property would never be developed. The property, which has been turned into a lovely parcel, is being used for environmental education. This is very lucky for all of us and others who enjoy nature. The land is being used by an abundance of different animals and many migratory birds. Manatee Audubon has documented 33 butterfly and 123 bird species on the property. We arrived at Felts and drove into the usually gated area. One must make an appointment to have the gates opened so you can drive in.

We spotted a greeter staring at us as he sat on top of an Eastern Bluebird nesting box. As we approached, he just continued to stare and most likely at the same time was searching for breakfast. The fog had lifted and the morning sun warmed us. Suddenly, the magnificent Red-shouldered Hawk flew down to the meadow grass and snagged a large insect. This is what we call hawking. This is now a term used by birders when any bird goes after prey. On the far fences near the many hanging Purple Martin gourds, we spotted small brown birds flitting about. Approaching closer, we discovered they were Savannah Sparrows identified with a spot on the chest, fine streaking also on the top of the chest and a yellow stripe on each side of the head.

We started hiking around a small but very pretty pond. Mother nature had landscaped it quite well with pond lilies and cattails. Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Cattle Egret, American Kestrel and Palm Warblers were spotted. I looked up into the pine trees and spotted a Great Horned Owl peering down at us and being very nonplussed that our little tribe was infringing on his territory. After long looks at this magnificent creature, we moved on around the pond. Suddenly, a pair of Pileated Woodpeckers flew from the trees right over us.

There are several reasons why VABA plans a trip to Felts and they are the Eastern Bluebird and the Painted Bunting. The first target bird of the day was in abundance flitting in and out the trees. It was the Eastern Bluebird. Manatee Audubon has erected many Eastern Bluebird boxes along the trail. We walked along the trail and wound up in a Bird Blind which is much like a duck blind. There are huge panels of glass so folks can be inside the blind and view the birds coming to the many feeders. Being in the blind does not disturb or frighten the birds. We were not disappointed. We were thrilled to see Painted Buntings, Indigo Buntings and a lovely Yellow-throated Warbler amongst many other birds. Suddenly all birds scattered as a dark shadow flew over head. It was our original greeter, the Red-shouldered Hawk, a predator of all small birds and animals. Things calmed down and soon the warblers returned. A Tufted Titmouse flew in along with several other warblers.

We left the blind and were walking through the woods. Portions of the ground were carpeted with beautiful purple sorrel and other pretty wildflowers. As we left the preserve, a Great Egret and Great Blue Heron watched as we said our goodbyes to this small but very birdy little preserve.

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