The Night-Heron

December 2013
Volume R, Number 4

The monthly newsletter from Manatee County Audubon Society.

Committed to protecting the environment in our community, our state, and our country
From the President’s Pen...

This Thanksgiving season, I trust everyone at Manatee Audubon expressed our gratitude for all you do as an Audubon supporter and volunteer. In fact, this newsletter starts a special section to recognize some of the incredible contributions of amazing individuals with a definite passion for birds, birding, nature, conservation, etc. We are truly blessed to have so many members freely share their time, talent and experience so others can gain insights & personal hands-on experience to grow their birding skills. This month we’re recognizing Fred Allen, who humbly invests not hours, but rather several days each month to make Felts Audubon Preserve a quality birding hotspot.

With the holiday season already in full swing, remember some great gift-giving opportunities include an annual membership to Manatee Audubon, enrollment in the excellent Basic Bird Identification course, or an overnight Audubon field trip with your bird buddy. If you want to add a few stocking stuffers under the tree, remember you can use the special Amazon.com link on our Manatee Audubon website so your purchases earn typically up to 5% of your purchase price as a charitable contribution to Manatee Audubon from the Amazon.com Associates program. (You don’t pay a dime more for this chapter benefit.)

Finally, keep in mind the end of year charitable contributions that may help your 2013 tax filing with the IRS. Manatee County Audubon Society has several key initiatives that invest in our future:

- Youth education with our “Give A Child a Day in the Wild” program,
- Our ongoing need for additional funds to grow the Barb Singer Felts Endowment...whereby ultimately we hope to have enough money to be able to use annual growth (earned financial interest & investment gains) as the funds for maintaining Felts Audubon Preserve.
- Beach-Nesting Bird Stewardship program is a fabulous community outreach program, but it also needs funding to make a more effective educational impact on both local residents and seasonal visitors.
- Honoring others and their passion for nature by funding purchases of a bench or other enhancements at Felts Audubon Preserve is a great way to leave a legacy.

Have a happy holiday season, and thanks for all of your incredible support this year!

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Last Call for 2014 Basic Bird Identification Course

There are just a few seats left, but get on the waiting list now. Reservations are being taken for the 2014 Beginning Bird Watching Course, offered by Manatee County Audubon Society (MCAS). This course includes 4 classes on:

- Friday, JAN 17th
- Mon, JAN 27th
- Thurs, JAN 30th
- Field Trip #1: Sat, JAN 25th
- Thurs, JAN 30th
- Field Trip #2: Sat, FEB 1st

Each class begins at 6:30 PM and lasts until 9:00 PM. All are held in the fellowship hall at the First United Methodist Church of Palmetto, 330 11th Ave, West, Palmetto, FL. The 2 field full-day trips included in this course begin at 7 AM. About 100 bird species will likely be seen and identified on these two field trips, probably including Painted Buntings, the signature bird of Felts Audubon Preserve, an MCAS property in Palmetto, FL.

Fee is $50, each, plus the 2014 MCAS membership fee ($20/household). No fee is paid until the first class; you may combine fees for multiple attendees on one check payable to: Manatee County Audubon Society. To participate, contact Nancy Dean at 941-792-9235 or nancybobdean@juno.com (best choice). — You’ll need to confirm your registration during the week ending Wed, Jan. 15th.
December Speaker – Monthly Audubon Meeting

Eric Draper, Audubon Florida

Date: Thursday, December 19
Location: 1st United Methodist Church of Palmetto
(330 11th Ave. W. Palmetto)
Fellowship: 6:30pm. Featured Speaker starts at 7pm.

A Florida native, Eric Draper as Executive Director of Audubon Florida, is a career conservationist and is recognized as a leading advocate for Everglades restoration, water resource protection and land conservation. Audubon owns Florida’s premiere ecotourism destination, Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, as well as other conservation lands and nature centers, fields 20 scientists to study water birds and their habitats, operates the Center for Birds of Prey, and is the state’s oldest and most influential conservation group with 35,000 members and 44 chapters. He will share updates on key legislative issues affecting Florida conservation efforts, as well as what we can do together to help impact local issues (like Long Bar Pointe mega-developments near key wildlife areas).

Eric has also explored the relationship between art and conservation. He is the featured speaker at the South Florida Museum in Bradenton on Dec. 4th in conjunction with their special botanical art exhibition highlighting work by William Bartram. Audubon Florida, like Bartram, focuses on connecting people to nature to develop support for conservation. Draper will explore some of the special places that Bartram traveled, samplings of some of his writing and drawings, and how they intersect with current day Audubon initiatives. Bartram’s work aligns with Audubon’s focus to protect the hemispheric flyways. He identified 215 North American bird species, tracked avian migration paths, and kept the first bird migration calendar. — This event is open to the public; register by phone: 941-746-4131, ext. 0 before this free event at the South Florida Museum reaches maximum capacity.

POTLUCK EVENT — Because you love food, and because you love birds, we’re looking forward to seeing you at this year’s Manatee Audubon holiday potluck dinner at this December monthly meeting. Bring your favorite potluck item to share with several other bird watchers—salad, main dish, vegetarian dish, or dessert. Please bring plates, cutlery, and serving utensils from home. We will provide coffee, iced tea, and water. — PLEASE BE PROMPT SO EVERYONE CAN ENJOY DINNER TOGETHER.

Thank You to our Recent Donors

Special thanks to these special folks who remembered our ongoing need for funding. These generous gifts will help to inspire both current and future birders & conservationists while they explore Felts Preserve & gain wildlife and environmental insights.

This past month Manatee County Audubon Society received financial donations from these wonderful folks:

Donors
Anonymous ($2,000) Carol Webster
Sara Werner Linda & Joseph Kinnan
Ruth Erlandson

Thank you donors!
December is time for the countdown to Christmas and it’s time for the National Audubon Society’s Christmas Bird Counts (CBC). You & others from Manatee Audubon can participate on Dec. 21st in our designated areas. The 114th international count involves bird-watchers across the country and overseas who annually survey the number of birds found in their designated 15-mile-diameter "count circle." The counts serve to not only monitor bird species and provide scientists with long-term base data, but are a chance for beginners and amateurs to team up with experts for a few hours or a full day’s experience identifying and counting local bird species.

Participate & learn numerous techniques, tips and suggestions from seasoned birders to help make your next bird spotting & identification experience the best it can be. Adding even a few of these to your annual CBC outing will enhance your team’s outcome with an increase in both species and numbers — making the count more accurate, more useful, and hopefully more fun! — Just contact Dick Comeau (ph: 752-1835) now so he can assign you to a team.

**WHAT TO EXPECT:**
Once in the field your team leader will go into more detail and provide first-hand experiences that will assist you in finding, “attracting,” and counting more birds.

**Please be sure to bring:** Layered clothing, comfortable shoes, paper and pen for taking notes, binoculars, plus drinks and snacks as needed.

**IMPORTANT UPDATE re: former GULF CIRCLE CBC PARTICIPANTS**
Just so that everyone is aware, it was decided that in the interest of better ornithological data collection during the Christmas Bird Counts to retire the Gulf Circle CBC in order to establish a new CBC circle. National Audubon would not allow two overlapping circles or to let us form a new circle unless the old circle was retired first. The new circle would include besides the north end of Anna Maria Island (north of current elementary school) other premier birding locations i.e.; Fort De Soto, Pinellas National Wildlife Refuge, Shell Key, Egmont Key, Skyway Bridge area, and other local hotspots. Except for Anna Marie Island these locations have never been covered by past CBC’s.

This decisions rationale has been proposed for many months by many local birders and previous CBC participants. Some of the rationale includes;
1. Fort De Soto County Park is too valuable a bird site to be excluded from National Audubon’s Christmas Bird Count.
2. Egmont Key used to be in the Gulf Circle but was never surveyed. It now would be included in the new circle.
3. The northern tip of Anna Maria Island, from 47th Street (near elementary school) would be included in the new circle.
4. Manatee Audubon would still be involved in the new circle, providing birders for the Anna Maria area plus others in the circle.
5. Fort De Soto, Egmont Key, Pinellas NWR islands, and Skyway Bridge area is a more bird friendly habitat than the current Gulf Circle with all its development and housing.
6. All past and present data, previously established by Gulf Circle CBC’s, would still be available and valuable for researcher’s future use.

Don Margeson, from the St. Petersburg area and a proponent for several years of this new circle, is in the process for filing the application with National Audubon, in order to create the new circle. It probably won’t happen this CBC season, but should be in place for the #115 CBC next year. As mentioned, many of our local birders will be involved in this new and exciting possibility. Changes, just like bird populations, are necessary to keep an eye on our environment through our citizen science efforts.
“Pink Snook”…How to Predict Spoonbill Success

Seeing the dramatic pink feathers of Florida’s favorite Roseate Spoonbills against a background of green reeds evoked colors of this holiday season, so thus this month we’re taking a deeper look at this species.

Dr. Jerry Lorenz, Audubon Florida’s expert on Roseate Spoonbills, thinks of them as “pink Snook”. During a presentation last month, Dr. Lorenz describes his research on the decline and restoration of this species, but still notes there are ongoing challenges to protect this flamboyant bird. He uses the “pink Snook” as tongue-in-cheek comparison when talking about roseate spoonbills—the large, pink wading bird with the strange beak and a huge following among birdwatchers. That’s because the diets of snook and roseate spoonbills “are almost identical,” says Dr. Lorenz. “So if you’re a fisherman, what’s good for the spoonbills is good for the snook.”

Statewide, things have been good for the roseate spoonbill. Their numbers are up from a low of 15 nesting pairs in 1941 to what Dr. Lorenz thinks could be 1,000 to 1,500 nesting pairs today.

But what roseate spoonbills are telling us about some of our estuaries, says Dr. Lorenz — particularly Florida Bay—isn’t good. If you heard about the recent capture of the oldest wild spoonbill, in the Florida Keys earlier this spring, that was Dr. Lorenz—State Director of Research for Audubon of Florida—and his team at the Tavernier Science Center.

Dr. Lorenz believes roseates live 30 years or more. But no one’s sure—about this or much else beyond its nesting habits. Despite the attention lavished on the roseate spoonbill, there are few birds in North America we know less about. Spoonbills nest in colonies during peak breeding season of November to March on mangrove islands, frequently above standing water and beneath a dense cover of branches. The locations keep predators — and biologists — at bay. Females typically lay three or four eggs, and the parents take turns incubating the eggs for about three weeks. After hatching, it takes about six weeks for the chicks to be able to leave the nest; the parents continue to feed their young for another three weeks.

When Dr. Lorenz compares roseates to snook, however, he’s on solid ground. He was a fish biologist long before he began studying spoonbills. In 1989 Audubon of Florida hired him to study the fish diets of wading birds. “I was basically paid to look at bird vomit,” he says. Those small fish he studied that live on the edges of mangroves are what scientists call a keystone community. “Everything in Florida Bay and the coastal Everglades depends on them at some point,” says Dr. Lorenz: alligators and crocodiles, snakes, birds, and gamefish.

Around the same time, a longstanding Audubon study of roseate spoonbills was coming to an end (funds had run dry). But Dr. Lorenz had looked at that study’s data and decided it was too important to stop. So he took it on by himself, without pay. By 1998, Dr. Lorenz had amassed the largest body of data on the species. And he developed a powerful insight about roseate spoonbills that has big implications for Florida Bay, the Everglades, and the game fish we pursue.

Spoonbills excel at fishing. Like ibises and wood storks, they’re tactile feeders, relying more on touch than on sight, as do herons. Tactile feeders wave their bills in the water, snapping up any small fish their very sensitive beaks can detect. To us, it sounds unproductive. But consider the snap of a wood stork’s bill—widely considered to be the fastest reflex in nature. Its strike time is about twice as fast as the star-
Welcome New Members

Manatee Audubon is delighted to expand our family with several new and 2 reinstated members.

**New members**
- Debbie Monreal & Bill Fitzsimmons
- Henry (Chris) Beaton
- Henry Tenenbaum
- Maxine Becker

**Reinstated members**
- Lori Page
- Mary Doney
- Caroline Grose
- Ken Latham
- Jean Piersma
- Janet Paisley
- Marianne King
- John Roberts
- Laura Timmes
- Bea Moran

**November Photo Contest—Congrats to Deb Yodock**

November attendees at the monthly meeting voted for their favorite species images...and there were 42 images from which to choose, so it was not an easy decision with so many great photos. Deb Yodock was a “double winner” earning the most votes for the top 2 photos (the pair of Painted Buntings, and the hungry Yellow-Crowned Night Heron) submitted in November.

**Felt’s Open House — Nov. Recap & Dec. 7th Event**

About 15 birdwatchers braved the damp weather for the Felt’s Open House on Nov. 2nd. Dee Haney led the bird walk, but because of rain, it was abbreviated. The birders however managed to see a Great Horned Owl, an American Kestrel, Pileated and Red-headed Woodpeckers. We then sat in the bird blind to wait for the rain to slow down. Finally, we were able to see some birds feeding. We saw female Painted and Indigo Buntings, Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren and Red Wing Blackbird. Altogether 17 species were sighted. Despite the dampness, it was an enjoyable day.

The next Open House is Saturday, Dec. 7th from 8am—noon. Join us!

*Article by Amy Miller*
Twelve participants (below) and leaders Nancy and Bob Dean enjoyed a fruitful visit to the Sarasota Celery Fields, Ackerman Lake, Palmer Road Pond and Founder's Pond on Fruitville Road on Nov. 19th.

Trip highlight was definitely the feeding frenzy at the recently refilled pond adjacent to the now defunct gazebo. Nearly every wader, except the Green Heron, which was seen at the end of the Raymond Road boardwalk, were present in large numbers, greedily feeding on fish and invertebrates. Seeing Lesser and Greater Yellow Throats together, provided fairly rare opportunity to compare bills, as well as, general body size and shape. Several Long-billed Dowitchers (top right) were added treats. Photographers in our group were in "hog heaven."

Only nine of us continued on to Linger Lodge for lunch. This is a great restaurant for casual group events and everyone was pleased with their food. Altogether 62 bird species were counted, despite missing the Ruddy Ducks at Ackerman, and the Canvasback at Founder's Club pond, where lawnmowers and a golf cart caused birds to fly away en masse just as we parked our cars.

(Group photos by Billie & Jerry Knight)
Despite very windy conditions on Nov. 14th, 16 participants (two from Indiana, two from Wisconsin and two from Ontario; the others were local residents) joined leaders Rick Greenspun and John Ginaven to spot & observe shorebirds on Siesta Key.

We tallied a meager 27 species in two hours. Off shore winds kept most birds way out in the gulf. Highlights included three flocks of Black Scoters, 30 Common Loons, Over 20 Snowy Plovers and a few Northern Gannets.

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Environmental Issues — Stand Up for Conservation

As some recipients know, the Long Bar Pointe proposal is still a threat to public safety, the health of Sarasota Bay and intense traffic congestion; because of the MAP amendment allowing for multi-use development rather than just residential use of this property. Additional equally troubling proposals await in the wings until the results of 2014 elections are known.

Other issues of concern to Manatee residents fail to reach citizen ears until it is too late to act. Therefore, the website, www.OurManatee.com, has been created and is up and running. Of vital importance are the goals of:

1. obtaining more petition signatures than were presented to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) on 6 AUG 2013; and,
2. seating at least citizen opponents at the 23 JAN 2014 BOCC hearing at the Civic Center in Palmetto (just north of the Desoto Bridge) and beginning at 9 AM.

Many of us feel that lacking mega funds, the citizens, who want to be heard must band together and use the power of their potential vote to influence BOCC members.

By going to the www.OurManatee.com website, which is set up by and for Manatee citizens, one can use a link provided to an “i-petitions” website where a petition against the MAP amendment, which the BOCC forwarded to the state for review on August 6th has now returned to the BOCC for final action, can be signed. We urge both petition signature AND citizen participation at the 23 JAN 2014, 9 AM BOCC hearing.

Article by Nancy Dean
Get to Know our Incredible Volunteers

There are so many individuals who quietly contribute vast quantities of time & talent to Manatee Audubon, and expect nothing in return. Their motivation is to serve, and to make the Audubon experience for everyone as best as possible. We want to say Thank You by sharing a monthly article on various volunteers. Please share your stories so we can continue to recognize these wonderful volunteers!

Fred Allen

MCAS: How & where did you first get interested in birds and birding... or butterflies?
FRED: I was about 9 or 10. I was sitting in the back yard during summer vacation and I spotted a black bird with red shoulders and asked my Father what it was. ‘Next thing I know, I had a pair of binoculars and a copy of Peterson's bird book. I became a member of The Massachusetts Audubon Society in 1970 until the late 80s, and spent a lot of time at many of their sanctuary's, until they became too politically involved, for me.

My interest in Butterflies did not come until I moved to Florida. The first place I visited was Emerson Point where there were hundreds of Butterflies in the fall and winter, so like with birding, I had to know what types they were and discovered Florida has quite a few different species and it has been interesting trying to find them all. Kind of a challenge I've given myself.

MCAS: Do you maintain a life list?
Fred: Yes I do. Not having traveled a lot, I only have about 223 bird species listed.

MCAS: Share your favorite bird & butterfly species. If there is something remarkable about any of these you especially like.
FRED: It's a tie between a Rufous-Sided (Eastern) Towhee and Black Caped Chickadee. I spent many a summer at our cottage on Cape Cod hand-feeding these guys.

MCAS: How long have you been involved with Manatee Audubon?
Fred: Since 2004. I missed all the hard work the members put in to get Felts Preserve up and running.

MCAS: What Manatee Audubon activities do you find the most rewarding? ... and How about many hours each week do you spend working at Felts?
FRED: Everything! Making the Preserve looking the best I can for visitors and wildlife alike. The time I spend at Felts Preserve varies from week to week; I don’t count it or call it “work”.

MCAS: Favorite vehicle?
Fred: The one I owned was a 1967 Chevrolet Chevelle SS 396. The one that got away: 1953 Jaguar XK120 DHC.

MCAS: Favorite type of music?
FRED: From Classical to Classic Rock. Most, but not all.

Fred Allen is at Felt's Audubon Preserve almost every day. He fills the bird feeders, maintains equipment, repairs fencing, mows the trails, fills the literature rack at the visitor welcome station, etc. We actually need to make a list of all the things he quietly does for MCAS.

Fred is active on the Felts Land Use committee, with monthly meetings addressing the various enhancements and work to prioritize tasks for the monthly Felts workday (the last Saturday of the month...in preparation for the following Saturday’s Open House event).
Guests of Audubon Florida appreciation luncheon at Bok Towers, Lake Wales, FL on 11/9/2013 for all Scrub Jay Survey participants. Representing Manatee Audubon were: Dick & Deb Comeau (back row), Lucette Wombacher (middle row center). Thanks for your participation!

Give a Child a Day in the Wild – Youth Education

Jack Schneider was at Felts Preserve on a special day when an “outdoor classroom” of students arrived for their “Day in the Wild”. Karen Fraley from Around the Bend Nature Tours leads these budding birders.

Thank you for your continuing donations to help fund this key educational outreach initiative throughout the school year.

As you can tell, the kids enjoy their “hands-on” learning activities designed to teach them about birds, native plants, ecosystems & conservation.
Think of them as “Pink Snook”

...continued from page 5...

tle time of its prey. Dr. Lorenz believes the roseate spoonbill is just as fast. “Its bill is amazingly porous, with lots of potential for nerve endings, so we think it’s very sensitive.” Day and (especially) night, roseates slowly walk through the water, sweeping their lowly walk through the water, sweeping their bills to and fro to locate fish. And like any veteran fisherman, they know that low water levels concentrate the fish and create a feeding bonanza.

In fact, as Dr. Lorenz proved, water flow—both its amount and its timing—are critical to creating that bonanza. Summer’s freshwater flows increase fish stocks. Winter’s dry-outs concentrate the fish, making them easy prey for spoonbills, which nest and brood in winter and spring, when the food supply is at its peak.

But—and this was Dr. Lorenz’s major insight—reversals in this flow, whether natural or man-made, can change everything. And today’s Florida Bay provides an excellent laboratory to study mucked-up water flows, because that’s exactly what today’s Everglades, with its dykes and canals and fake lakes, has created.

And that’s why spoonbills aren’t doing very well there, despite their recovery statewide. “We’re not witnessing the demise of the roseate spoonbill,” says Dr. Lorenz. “The spoonbills are telling us we’re witnessing the demise of the Everglades.”

About the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), Dr. Lorenz is as skeptical as he is optimistic. Just two of eight projects the State has taken from the U.S. government and fast-tracked will, in his opinion, have any effect on the environment. “The other six have more to do with water supply for people. So I worry that Congress will see no progress and pull the plug.” But he also sees reason for hope. One of the two projects—fixing south Miami-Dade County’s infamous C111 canal, which forces tons of water where it never used to go—could “solve 80% of the problem with Florida Bay,” he believes.

He’s also starting to get attention from unlikely places. “Last year I got weekly calls from a hydrologist at the South Florida Water Management District—about spoonbills, how they were doing, where and what the water levels should be to keep them in good shape.” This mid-level manager took guidance from Dr. Lorenz up to decision makers, “and as a result, we didn’t mess up a good natural water flow.”

Dr. Lorenz senses a change in heart at the Army Corps of Engineers and the District. “I think they’ve taken it to heart that they can’t concern themselves only with flood control and water supply.” Whatever we decide to do with the water flows into Florida Bay, the roseate spoonbill will be among the first to tell us whether we got it right or wrong.

Be sure if you are able to clearly see leg bands on roseate spoonbills, report the band’s color & numerical information to the local Audubon chapter so they can help these scientists better understand the movement of these pink plumed beauties.
December Bird Walks & Field Trips, Events

**Monday, December 2 — 5:00pm**
Eagle Extravaganza -- Lori Roberts, 404-941-4365

**Saturday, December 7 — 8:00am**
Open House Felts Preserve- 729-2222

**Tuesday, December 10 — 8:30am**
Emerson Point Bird Walk -- Lucette Wombacher 776-8424

**Wednesday, December 11 — 5:30pm**
Manatee Audubon Board of Directors meeting

**Saturday, December 14 — 8:30am**
Skyway Approach Hot Spots 592-7622 – Billie & Jerry Knight. - BillielKnight@yahoo.com

**Thursday, December 19 — 6:30pm**
Monthly meeting, with holiday potluck dinner. Spkr: Eric Draper, Executive Director, Audubon Florida

**Saturday, December 21—**
Christmas Bird Count – contact Dick Comeau 752-1835 dickcomeau@tampabay.rr.com. Start times may vary, so check with your team leader.
9:00am — Jr Audubon – contact Steve Black 376-0110

**Saturday, December 28 — 8:00am**
Work Day, Felt’s Preserve 729-2222

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**CONTACTS** — Manatee Chapter Board meetings are on the 2nd Wednesday of the month at 5:30 in the main Manatee County Library building.

**CHAPTER OFFICERS 2013-2014**
President — Jim Stephenson 301-466-1973
Vice Pres — Deb Comeau 752-1835
Secretary — Patty Petruff 747-1789
Treasurer — Lucette Wombacher 776-8424

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- Christmas Bird Count …………… Dick Comeau 752-1835
- Conservation …………………………Open 729-2222
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- Field Trips …………………………Connie Zack 758-2929
- Felts Audubon Preserve ………………Tom Heitzman 737-3169
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**PHOTO CREDITS:**
Front Cover: Roseate Spoonbill. Photographer unknown.

**INJURED BIRD HELP:**
Call 778-6324 for what to do.

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Manatee County Audubon Society
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Manatee County Audubon Society is a chapter of National Audubon Society Inc.