Chimney Swifts

Photo by Glori Berry,
Courtesy of Avian Haven
Greetings all from beautiful Bradenton, (yes, Carmenza and I are actually in Bradenton at the moment) and Bradenton is indeed beautiful at this time of the year. Warm days melt into soft evenings with glowing sunsets. It is truly a great time of year for birding and there is, indeed, a lot of birding going on. We’ve had several great outings already with many more to come.

It’s also the season for festivals. We had a table at the Anna Maria Island BayFest. Many many thanks to Lori Roberts for setting up, and to all those who helped. (More info below.)

Don’t forget that we will also have a table at the Sarasota Bay Water Festival at Ken Thompson Park behind the Mote aquarium this Saturday, November 1. Come on out for good food, good music, and a good time.

The weather also makes it a perfect time to come out and do a little bit to help keep Felts Audubon Preserve the beautiful place that it is. Please remember that the maintenance of the preserve is in our hands. We pay for the large things, but for chores like cleaning the bird blind, cleaning the fountain and putting in clean water, weeding the areas with plantings, killing fire ants, etc. etc. etc. we depend totally on volunteer help, normally on work days which are the last Saturday of the month. **NOTE:** In November, because of Thanksgiving, the official monthly Felts Preserve workday will be held the Saturday prior to Thanksgiving.

Last weekend, we had a better than usual turn out with seven of us attending. Remember, you don’t have to do hard labor to really help out a lot. Hope to see some new faces at Felts in November.

Our “Give a Child a Ride to the Wild” program, which we started in 2013, was so successful that Diane Erwin K-12 Science Specialist, School District of Manatee County, went to the School Board and convinced them to send the entire third-grade of Manatee County schools to Felts Audubon Preserve during the school year 2014–2015. The Mosaic Company stepped up with a grant to fund improvements at the preserve and to make the field trips possible. Shown here are Sandy Patrick and Grant Lykins, Mosaic Ecologists, presenting a check for $20,000 to Diane and to Mary Glass, Executive Director, Manatee Education Foundation in front of the Felts Preserve bird blind. Connie Zack and Amy Miller, members of our Board of Directors, were there as well, and I was also happily applauding the event. Jackie Baron of Mosaic, the person that really made this happen was hiding behind the camera. We, pretty much, have the first half of the year’s trips funded and are pursuing grants to fund the second half. If you would like to donate to this wonderful cause, just go to our website and click the “donate now” button.

We, along with Scott Niblick, attended another great Audubon Assembly at the Hutchison Island Marriott. The sessions were fascinating and the other attendees, as usual, most interesting to meet and get to know. The theme was conservation, and, for two days, we lived, breathed and ate conservation. Then on Sunday, we went out with Captain Nancy to Bird Island, the rookery she has fought to preserve for many years now. The highlight of the evening was, in addition to hundreds of shorebirds flying in to roost, the arrival of dozens of Magnificent Frigate Birds accompanied by tales of efforts to conserve the Indian River Lagoon. Stuart is a really neat town to visit. If you get by there, do visit the Gilbert’s Bar Refuge House right by the Marriott for a great glimpse of Florida’s history.

And that’s about it for this month. Hope to see you on one of our trips or at our next meeting. Happy birding! Jim Stephenson
November 20th Guest Speaker
Rachel Mullen, The Mangrove Cuckoo Project

Location: Hope Lutheran Church, 4635 26th St. West, Bradenton (approx 2 blocks south of Cortez Rd.)
Time: 6:30pm fellowship Speaker Starts: 7pm

Mangrove Cuckoos (Coccyzus minor) are a rare inhabitant of the mangrove forests and woodlands of southern Florida. A tropical species, they are found nowhere else in the United States. Weighing, on average, 65 grams (about the same as 12 quarters), their black mask, two-toned bill and bright buffy underparts are what distinguishes them from their close relatives, the Yellow-billed and Black-billed Cuckoo.

Beyond casual observation and anecdotal accounts, biologists have only the crudest of information regarding their migratory behavior, breeding biology and habitat preferences. For example, Mangrove Cuckoos are known to inhabit a variety of woodland types throughout their range, however in Florida they appear to be restricted to mangrove forests.

Rachel Mullin joined the Eco-studies team in 2010, when she began working on the Mangrove Landbird Monitoring Project. It was on this project that Rachel developed a keen interest in mangrove ecology and the conservation of the Mangrove Cuckoo. Her current work focuses on the research and conservation of Mangrove Cuckoos in southwest Florida. She has also led the development and implementation of Eco-studies’ Mangrove Cuckoo education program for young adults.

Rachel received her B.S. degree in Wildlife Management and Conservation at Humboldt State University. Her passion for avian research developed when she worked on a nesting ecology project in Venezuela, and she has since worked on a wide range of avian studies in the U.S., Mexico and South America. When not working, she often spends her time traveling the world with her husband, Steve.
Audubon Adventures is an environmental education program for children in grades 3 to 5. Developed by professional environmental educators, Audubon Adventures presents standards-based science content about birds, wildlife, and their habitats. The program is used by classroom teachers, informal educators, home school educators, after-school program coordinators, special education instructors, science specialists, camp program leaders, ESL teachers, and language arts teachers.

With captivating hands-on activities, students learn that we all have a personal stake in the health of the environment and play an important role in its preservation and improvement. Audubon Adventures is distributed in two formats: web-based ($16) or print-based (ranging from $8 to $35).

Check out the classroom-oriented website, audubonadventures.org to discover exclusive content for teachers and students.

The newest Audubon Adventures Classroom Kit will be presented exclusively on the Audubon Adventures website where teachers can access all new student magazines, background information, hands-on activities, and much more!

Read about what is included the web-based subscription. Donations accepted for class subscriptions.
New Chimney Swift Tower in Felts Audubon Preserve

Felts Audubon Preserve is home to an object that is leaving some visitors scratching their heads. Puzzled visitors who stumble onto a tall, thin structure looking like a chimney minus its house are probably entertaining some pretty bizarre thoughts about what it is and what it’s for.

The approximately 15-foot tower was actually designed and built to be a combination maternity ward and communal roost for a bird that often goes without much fanfare. Chimney swifts need housing, so the Felts Land Use Committee formed a team with Tom Heitzman, Jerry Knight and Fred Allen playing key roles, to install a “bird high-rise” in the preserve. When they move in, both birds and people will be winners. An adult swift can consume up to 1000 mosquito-sized insects a day.

Chimney swifts, \( \text{Chaetura pelagica} \), are a common species in the eastern half of the US, but many people aren’t familiar with them. They are easily confused with bats or swallows since they catch their food on the wing. However, they are not closely related to either.

Chimney swifts have been described as “flying cigars”. Their stubby bodies and swept-back wings give them that look. Their tiny legs are designed for clinging to vertical surfaces. They cannot walk, and spend almost every waking hour on the wing. They drink & bathe by taking on water while flying.

There are many species of swift worldwide, but the chimney swift is the only kind in the eastern United States. Prehistorically, they nested in caves and hollow trees. As settlers moved west, cut the forests, and built homes with chimneys, the birds substituted masonry for wood, and found lots of flying insects over towns. During the summer when people built no fires, chimneys were great places to build nests, raise young, and roost in large communal groups before heading to tropical climates in the fall.

For several decades, chimney swift numbers have been declining. Lack of suitable habitat is believed to be a major cause. Heating homes with fuel-efficient gas burners that use metal pipes to vent furnace exhaust has eliminated nesting space. People who are less attuned to nature than in earlier days are often bothered by strange noises (hungry swift babies) coming from their fireplaces during early spring. They put screens over chimney tops to keep unknown “pests” out, unaware that they may be evicting a swift family from its nursery.

With such pressures increasingly hurting swift populations, concerned conservationists have developed several designs for chimney swift towers. That knowledge was among the factors in the decision to construct a Chimney Swift tower at Felts Audubon Preserve. Now, with the tower ready, the virtual “welcome sign” should attract chimney swifts heading south again. Be sure to watch for activity at this new attraction at Felts Audubon Preserve.
Volunteer Appreciation

ANNA MARIA ISLAND BAYFEST EVENT —

Thank you to the team of volunteers who staffed the Manatee Audubon table at the Anna Maria Island 2014 Bayfest event on Saturday, Oct. 18th.

Carole & Russ Luttinen worked the first shift, and then Kathy Goerlitz and Nancy Keegan staffed the table in the afternoon.

Extra appreciation for that afternoon team (including Kathy’s hubby) who not only dismantled and packed down the tent & table, but also Nancy stored the materials for a few days.

New Migratory Bird Stamp Art Chosen

On September 20, 2014 a panel of five judges chose new artwork to grace the 2015-2016 Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation [Duck] Stamp. After judging 186 pieces of artwork, there was a three-way tie in the voting. This was a first in the history of the contest. Extra rounds of judging had to be run to select the final top three pieces.

The winning artwork was of a pair of lovely Ruddy Ducks (at left) painted in acrylic by Jennifer Miller of Olean, New York. Describing her outdoor as well as artistic interests, Miller said, “I am mostly self-taught, with no formal art education, and studied under the guidance of the natural world... I go out of my way daily to study, observe, and learn about my interests. I am equally happy examining a wild bird through binoculars as I am examining bits of moss growing across a fallen tree.”

Miller is only the third woman to win this prestigious contest. You can find out more about Miller and her work on her website: www.featherdust.com/jen.html

For more on the contest and the program see the website for the Federal Duck Stamp Office: www.fws.gov/duckstamps/

Ron Louque of Charlottesville, VA placed 2nd with his painting of a red-breasted merganser.

Frank Mittelstadt of Beaver Dam, WI, took 3rd place with his acrylic painting of a Canada goose.
With Christmas less than 2 months away, remember if you shop on Amazon.com for items, please access the Amazon.com website from the link on the Manatee Audubon home page. Without any additional cost, Manatee Audubon earns up to 5% of the purchase price of items you buy. For your convenience, you can also CLICK HERE to also get to the Amazon.com website with Manatee Audubon being credited as the “referral” site. During the last 12 months, this program has earned over $800 for Manatee Audubon. Thank You & Happy Shopping!

PS — Share this link with friends & other family members, too!
The team from Mosaic has arranged for a special (probably a “once in a lifetime”) birding trip on **Friday, Nov. 14th** at the upscale **Streamsong Resort**, followed by a nearby trip to the **Mosaic Peace River Park**, which as you know is on the Florida Great Birding Trail list. An experienced naturalist from the Mosaic team will serve as our private field guide for this special trip. The management of Streamsong extended incredible hospitality by providing participants a complimentary breakfast in their resort restaurant!

During this birding trip we’ll hear how Mosaic planned to restore one of their former mining sites so it would be even better environmentally than before the mining commenced. Today you’ll see a beautiful bass fishing lake & 2 championship golf courses as part of this 5-star resort. We’ll be birding along the lakeshore and also the tree-lined perimeter of one of the golf courses.

From there we’ll travel a few miles to Mosaic Peace River Park, a Florida Great Birding Trail site. Our guide will point out the key avian species.

**SPACE LIMITED**

Sign up today; email **ManateeAudubon@gmail.com** OR call Lori Roberts at: 404-941-4365. Check website for details.

**DATE CHANGE TO FRIDAY, NOV. 14TH**
Find resident and migrant shorebirds on Siesta Key. Meet at Public Beach north parking lot (near concession stand pavilion) at 8:30 am...address: 948 Beach Rd, Sarasota, FL 34242. Group might also gather at the very north end of this parking lot, so listen for laughter & look for folks wearing birding gear.

Shorebird walk with our own experts Rick Greenspun 284-2055 birddoggie1@gmail.com and John Ginaven 383-5133. Learn how to ID those small birds of similar shapes and colors.

The sighting of a Red-necked Phalarope in September has been the buzz of Siesta Key. Who knows if you’ll be able to see that species on this walk, but we’ll keep looking for him. Our “cousins” from Sarasota Audubon’s bird walk on Siesta Key (shown above) in late October included sightings of American Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, FOS Herring Gull, American Avocet, and several Snowy Plovers. Enjoy the weather & come out to learn more about our Gulf coast shorebirds!
November & Early December – Bird Walks & More

Manatee County Audubon Events

Saturday, November 1
8:00am OPEN HOUSE at Felts Audubon Preserve

9:30am Sarasota Bay Water Festival – Manatee Audubon exhibit table

Saturday, November 8
8:30am Siesta Key Bird Walk

Friday, November 14
7:00am Streamsong Resort; Mosaic Peace River Park

Saturday, November 15
9:00am Junior Audubon

Thursday, November 20
8:30 pm Monthly Membership Meeting – Manatee Audubon

Saturday, November 22
8:00am Work Day, Felts Preserve 729-2222

Tuesday, December 2
5:30 pm Eagle Extravaganza - Jim Stephenson president@manateeaudubon.org 301-466-1973

Saturday, December 5
8:00am OPEN HOUSE at Felts Audubon Preserve

Tuesday, December 9
8:30 am Emerson Point Bird Walk - Visitor’s Center Parking Lot

Thursday, December 11
8:00am Terra Cela & Manatee Hot Spots Ellie & Jerry Knight 592-7522 billie.knight@yahoo.com

Tuesday, December 16
Circle B Bar Deb Yodock d.yodock@yahoo.com 941-794-1269

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

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INJURED BIRD HELP:
• Call 778-6324 for what to do. Someone will call you back.

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