Believe it or not, Christmas is right around the corner once again. When we lived up north, we would occasionally have a "Cardinal Christmas". Overnight, a soft, wet snow would fall and coat the branches of a bushy Crepe Myrtle tree in our backyard. Cardinals, waiting their turn at the bird feeders would cover the tree. Their bright red against the background of white would create our very own natural Christmas tree. Here in Manatee County, we tend more often to have "Bluebird Christmas" days.

December 21st was just such a bluebird day. We were fortunate enough, to go with Capt. Kathe Fannon and Capt. Patsy from Cortez on a fabulous boat ride to count both water and shorebirds on and around Sarasota Bay. These two ladies know every inch of every sandbar, grass flat, channel and shoal in the Bay. Not only that, but they know everything that lives above and below the water. When not pointing out these natural wonders, they can give you the history, not only of the fishing industry in Cortez, but of the islands surrounding Cortez as well. We "cooned" (drifted slowly sideways) down the shoreline of Long Bar (the Pointe is the developers’ affectation) counting birds. The water is so shallow on the approach to Long Bar that, of the more than 1000 birds that we saw, Mike Corso's team of Eija Friedlander, Robert & Sara Zavos, Carol & Lee were only able to positively identify about 400 birds. Even with the shallow draft of Captain Kathe's pontoon boat we were not able to approach closer. It was truly a Christmas Bird Count to remember. Do yourself a favor and take a 2 hour (or more, they're flexible!) boat ride with one of these ladies. They both have websites, the tours are wonderful and, a closely kept secret, they'll order lunch so it's ready and waiting for you at the Star Fish Company dockside restaurant when you land. (You still have to pay for lunch, however!)

We saw first-hand the effects of trimming mangroves. Everywhere the mangroves are in their natural state, there are hundreds of birds. Where the mangroves are trimmed to about a 6’ height, there are no birds!

Speaking of “Bluebird Days”, we had another one when Eric Draper, Executive Director of Audubon Florida and our own Lucette Wombacher led a VIP bird walk at Emerson Point on the 19th of December. County Commissioner Betsy Benac turned out for the walk, and we had a very enjoyable walk and talk on a beautiful afternoon. Later, Eric talked about the need for conservative land management in Florida, the very special places that we have all around us and the need to preserve them. Thank you Eric!

So, on to business! If any of you need to get some charity contributions on the books for this year’s tax reporting, there’s no time like the present. Just click on the donate button on our website or send a check payable to Manatee County Audubon Society to Lucette at PO Box 14550, Bradenton, FL 34280-4550.

Finally, and most importantly, thanks, thanks and thanks again to all the volunteers that get out the newsletter, guide our marvelous bird walks, keep the books, maintain Felts Preserve, attend community meetings, plan and advertise our events keeps us nourished physically and mentally at our meetings and do all the little cruddy odd jobs that have to be done to keep our organization afloat! (How about that Captain Kathe? A nautical reference!) I wish each and every one of you and yours the happiest of holidays and a prosperous and healthy New Year!

PS — MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS ARE DUE NOW. Manatee Audubon memberships are “per calendar year”, so be sure you’re paid up for the 2014 calendar year. Local Membership dues are only $20 per household. THEY ARE DUE NOW. DUES ARE PAYABLE BY JANUARY 31. If you have paid dues any time after July 1, 2013, you are paid up until January of 2015. Otherwise please send your check payable to: Manatee County Audubon Society (MCAS), PO Box 14550, Bradenton, FL 34280. You may also pay in person at our January General Meeting on January 16.
January Speaker — Monthly Audubon Meeting

“Photo Fantasia” from Ron Mayberry

Date: Thursday, January 16th
Location: 1st United Methodist Church of Palmetto
(330 11th Ave. W. Palmetto)
Fellowship: 6:30pm.  Featured Speaker starts at 7pm.

Traveling the globe, Ron continues to expand his portfolio of dramatic photos in nature with wildlife. You’ll feel like you’re right with Ron while viewing his amazing images captured during his recent travels. Join us this month and hear the stories of his travels.

“Duck Dynasty” at Emerson Point Preserve

We had a beautiful day for the December 10 bird walk at Emerson Point Preserve. It started out cool with very little activity, but the morning warmed up quickly and the birds got busy. The eleven birders were treated to several sightings, and we actually saw a Pine Warbler foraging in a pine tree. The Ospreys were not yet nesting, but we had several good looks as they flew around us or perched high in trees. Altogether we saw a total of 33 different species.

On December 19th, Manatee Audubon returned to Emerson Point to host a VIP Bird Walk open to the public with Audubon Florida’s executive director, Eric Draper, serving as co-leader of this bird walk with Lucette Wombacher. Commissioner Betsy Benac participated along with several other birders. Blue and Green-winged teals were among the “duck dynasty” in the ponds. No need for duck calls. This event was covered in The Bradenton Herald, noting that Eric was our featured speaker at our monthly meeting that evening.
For the first time, Manatee Audubon counted birds...by land & sea! A new sector was added to this year’s Christmas Bird Count along Long Bar Pointe. The obvious mission was to quantify the wildlife that would potentially be lost if their habitat was disrupted or destroyed. We received front page coverage in The Bradenton Herald newspaper on Sunday, Dec. 22...and on Dec. 23rd, the developers withdrew their request to have the County Commissioners vote on the Comprehensive Plan Map Amendment.

BREAKING NEWS: Long Bar Pointe Map Amendment Withdrawn

Bird lovers participated Saturday in the time honored, yearly tradition of counting Manatee County’s bird population. This time, however, they took to their efforts by land and sea.

Photos taken within minutes of each other during Dec. 21st annual Christmas Bird Count.

Above LEFT Tidy Island... with “tidy” trimmed mangroves just north of Long Bar Pointe shoreline. Where are the birds?

Above RIGHT: Long Bar Pointe shoreline, abundant with birds.
We wanted to thank everyone for their time and effort yesterday in our Terra Ceia/Palmetto sector of the Bradenton Christmas Bird Count - great fellowship, great birding, great weather:)! Our huge Gull seen at the Palmetto Boat Ramp has been positively ID’d by 3 people as a Lesser Black-backed Gull...great find for Manatee County, and I must say Jerry and I have lived here for 4 years and have never seen a Lesser Black-backed at our boat ramp. We went for an early dinner at Kostas (didn’t feel like cooking) and checked out the Palmetto Rookery again. We saw two Monk Parakeets (one Monk actually took a twig to the top of the palm...possibly nesting?) and we had a flyover of 5 squawking Nanday Parakeets, bringing our total # of species to 93! Awesome work!

Special thanks to Josh, our youngest participant, and to Peg, who did a great job patiently recording each of our sightings. — Article by Jerry & Billie Knight, with team photo shown below.

Matt Holman provided Christmas Bird Count chairman Dick Comeau with preliminary results of the Ellenton West sector’s bird count. Their total species count was 59. Everyone on the team had a good time; some of the group were caught in this snapshot below. Team members: Al & Suzanne Semago, Karen & Matt Holman, Scott Niblick, Fred Allen.

This year was the 114th Annual Christmas Bird Count where “citizen scientists” across America work in teams to record the various species and quantify the number of birds per species seen. This information is then aggregated up to National Audubon Society for a national compilation. Trends are then analyzed to help in conservation insights.

Thanks to Dick Comeau and everyone who helped with this year’s Annual Christmas Bird Count!
Field Trip Recaps

Palmetto / Terra Ceia Area — **Sora Sighted!!**

Dec. 14 — Thirteen people attended the Palmetto/Terra Ceia Field Trip on Saturday, Dec. 14th. Places visited were the **Palmetto Rookery, Treatment Center, Hightower Road, Palmetto Point Boat Ramp,** and **ponds in Bishop Harbor.** Birds of interest were: **Northern Shovelers,** **Blue and Green-winged Teal,** **Spotted Sandpiper,** and **Common Loons.** As we were leaving the Palmetto Boat Ramp, one of the Common Loons called its' beautiful, mystical call. On Hightower Road, there were flocks of **Great Egret,** **White Ibis,** **Roseate Spoonbills,** and a **Reddish Egret.** Flyovers included a **Red-tailed Hawk** and an **immature Bald Eagle.** At our last stop, we had an appearance of a **Sora,** one of our first ever sightings in Manatee County and a lifer for several on the field trip. Morning tally was 67 species seen. Eleven of us then headed to Popi’s Restaurant for brunch. Good morning of birding fellowship with beautiful December weather.

Eagle Extravaganza

About 20 people (and several motorists driving by) were delighted with seeing approximately **30 Bald Eagles** at Manatee Audubon’s annual “eagle extravaganza” on Dec. 2nd. The pinnacle point of this site is the cell tower on Lena Road, about 1/2 mile south of SR 64 (Manatee Ave) since it offers a handy parking area as well as about 15-18 eagles who flew in to roost at dusk. Skies were cloudy so photographers weren’t able to get breathtaking images, but **Deb Yodock** still provided us with the nice juvenile image at right.

Felts Preserve—December 7th Open House

What a great community event! 24 birders enjoyed beautiful weather for the Felts Open House Bird Walk on December 7th. 36 species of birds were seen, with the **Great Horned Owl** sitting atop the pine tree during the Open House. A flock of **Nanday Parakeets** started off the morning, with plenty of **Palm and Yellow-rumped Warblers,** **American Kestrel,** and the male **Painted Bunting** put in an appearance on the feeder at the Bird Blind.

Thanks to **Billie Jerry Knight** for serving as the bird walk leaders, and also to **Scott Niblick** provided a scope for the “camera-shy” owl viewing.

We had several carloads of birders as special guests from **Tampa Audubon** who arrived at 11:30am, so it made the day extra special!!

**Article by Billie Knight**
With Manatee Audubon’s field trip in early Feb to the Birds of Prey Center, and with the focus on raptors at the 2014 Space Coast Bird Festival, this issue of The Night-Heron will prepare you for some fun cocktail party conversation for you night owls. (Enough with the bird puns…)

Snowy Owls Farther South than Usual

Beautiful white Snowy Owls moved south from the Arctic in the last weeks of November and early December.

Maps at right show Snowy Owl sightings in November 2009 (top map), Nov. 2011, and Nov. 2013 (bottom map).

More of the stunning creatures likely are on the way south in what biologists call an irruption - a dramatic migration of large numbers of birds to areas far from their normal ranges. Ornithologist Pete Dunne says, "It's a natural spectacle, like a meteor shower, something you should see." The iconic birds are fairly easy to see because they are active during the day, their striking plumage stands out in snowless southern landscapes and they favor wide-open settings, such as beaches, dunes and bays. They are captivating to seasoned birders as well as non-birders.

While they eat mostly lemmings in the Arctic, snowies will eat rabbits, voles, mice, gulls and ducks. Food, combined with population numbers, are the likely reasons the birds are so far south in such large numbers, but exactly what is at work in the owl's northern environment is not clear, according to Dunne.

Dunne says the southern diaspora appears to be almost exclusively young birds. Sexing snowy owls and estimating their ages depends on their plumage. Young females are heavily barred with black, males less so. Older females retain some barring, while adult male owls are, as their name implies, snowy white.

There is speculation that a boom in lemmings in the Arctic led owls to increase their production of young, and then the juveniles flew south in search of territory with less competition for food.—But all this is speculation for now.

(Article content referenced from article published in USA Today)
Welcome New Members

New Members
Martha Lincoln
Bev Ferguson
John Alsop
Francis Bourbeau
Jonn & Jerri Phillips
Charles Glenn Amrhein

Reinstated Members
Janet & Robert Epstein

REMINDER — Membership dues should have been paid in December.
Local Membership annual dues are only $20 per household.
- THEY ARE DUE NOW. Dues are payable by January 31.
If you have paid dues any time after July 1, 2013, you are paid up until January of 2015.
Otherwise please send your check payable to:
Manatee County Audubon Society (MCAS),
PO Box 14550, Bradenton, FL 34280.
You may also pay in person at our January General Meeting on January 16.

Thank You to our Donors!
Ann Capagna
Jim Stephenson
Smithy McGinnis
Manatee Community Foundation
Capt. Kathe
Capt. Patsy

The donor with the “mostest” on the ball!

Thursday afternoon Dec. 19th, Ann Capagna called the Manatee Audubon phone line and inquired about matching donations to Manatee Audubon. We assured her, that if she made a donation before the end of the year, it would be matched, and told her to go on our website, click the “Donate Now” button and input her credit card information. We then arranged to have her generous donation matched! Somewhat frustrated, she called again on Sunday, saying that she had tried several times to donate and clicking the “Donate Now” button took her nowhere. She was absolutely right, the button did nothing. Thanks to Ann, the button has been fixed, her donation made and matched and Ann gets the President’s P for persistence award. — Ann, thank you so much.

P.S. Ann is delightful to talk to on the phone! Happy Holidays, Ann!

Raptors are the Rage!

The star of this year’s Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival in Titusville, FL is the Raptor, so this issue of The Night-Heron focuses on some of these fascinating species.

As a reminder, even though the name of the host facility for the Space Coast Birding Festival, Eastern Florida State College, has changed from Brevard Community College, the campus is still located at: 1311 N. US 1 in Titusville. The Registration Desk, classrooms, workshops, field trip staging, exhibits, and food service will be from January 22-27, 2014. Visit http://spacecoastbirdingandwildlifefestival.org/index.php for directions & festival information. It’s phenomenal!
Thank You Business Partners

Please support the businesses that have helped Manatee Audubon.

**Beach Boat Tours & Charters**  
Contact: **Capt. Kathe Fannon**  
(941) 812-3241

Located @ the dock of the Star Fish Company dockside restaurant, 12306 46th Ave W., Cortez, FL

Serving the Cortez/Anna Maria/Bradenton Beach area.  
- Eco Boat Trips
- Fishing Charters
- Sightseeing Boat Tours

http://captkathe.com/cortezcaptkathe.html

Capt. Kathe & Capt. Patsy provided boats for **Manatee Audubon Christmas Bird Count** teams scouting the Long Bar Pointe sector.

**Captain Patsy Charters**

J ust a quick THANK YOU again to The **Manatee Community Foundation (MCF)** and their grant awarded in spring 2013 to Manatee Audubon for funding with our “**Give a Child a Day in the Wild**” educational initiative. Since October we’ve had kids each month at Felts Audubon Preserve exploring the symbiosis between plants and animals in the various ecosystems with the leadership of **Karen Fraley** and her **Around the Bend** team.

MCF is a creative, cost-effective and tax-efficient way for people to invest in the charitable causes they care about most. The Manatee Community Foundation has grown to over 100 donor funds and $21 million in assets. Since 1988, over $5 million in grants & scholarships have been “given back” to the community. 18 non-profit agencies in the community have placed their endowments under the MCF “umbrella”.

While talking with others, please remember to mention some words of praise for these fine organizations!
Thank you to all the photographers who submitted images for our monthly contest. There are so many from which to choose, and sometimes we even learn later that an individual has submitted more than one image, which could increase their odds of winning recognition, but it could also work against them if the votes are split between those images from the same photographer. — So THANK YOU for understanding we have LOTS of excellent photos being shared in this forum each month.

The top 2 images receiving the most votes this month are beautiful. Deb Yodock caught a Pileated Woodpecker, and Julie Heishman somehow got these Royal Terns posing for her lens.

**December Contest Winners**

![Pileated Woodpecker](image1.jpg)  
by Deb Yodock

![Royal Terns](image2.jpg)  
by Julie Heishman

**Beach Renourishment and Groin Construction Projects**

Each renourishment project started on Anna Maria Island this month. If all goes as planned, they will be renourished by May of next year.

The sand comes from 4,000 feet down, deep off of the gulf floor, through pipes that carry it onto the shore. The vessels doing the work can pump the slurry from as far as nine miles out from shore to replace eroded sand.

Due to special funding Congress approved after the devastation from Hurricane Sandy, Manatee County’s Parks and Natural Resource Department Director, Charlie Hunsicker, moved quickly to help get $10 million from the Federal Government shifted from the NE region of the US to our local Gulf coast so only $6 million more from state and local taxes could complete this extensive $16 million project.

The Anna Maria Island beach nourishment projects began in 1989 with the Manatee County Beach Management Plan. Since then, artificial mitigative reef construction, dune restoration, sea grass transportation and canal maintenance projects have protected the property values.

In early 2014, before the Anna Maria Island renourishment is finished, the Cortez Beach groin replacement project will begin. The overall construction is scheduled around turtle (and some shorebird) nesting season and will take 9 months to complete.

(Article content from The Bradenton Times. Photo: BayNews9)
The Great Horned Owl is a large, powerful, and mostly nocturnal owl. It is also the only large owl with ear tufts. The Great Horned Owl is very widespread and common, but can vary in color dramatically between regions although its markings do remain reasonably constant and it always has prominent ear tufts. Its underparts have thin dark brown bars on a whitish base with the upper chest bars becoming somewhat blotchy. The throat has a bold white patch; white mustache and white to tan along the sides of the bill into the eyebrows. The prominent facial disk is bordered at the sides with black. The eyes are from lemon yellow to straw colored with a thin black border. The backside has fine dark mottling with dark bars on the primaries and tail. The races tend to blend with their habitat in their coloration. The owl varies in overall and facial disk color from whitish to orange-buff to brownish-gray to dark brown. The northern members of the subarticus race being the lightest with a whitish facial disk and overall whitish-buff base color. The darkest race being the saturatus with a deep brown facial disk, chest, and base color to its backside.

**Young:** The young are similar in coloration with the adults although their barring and dark markings are not as crisp and defined, ear tufts smaller or not apparent. It also has a screech similar to a barn owl.

**Habitat:** The Great Horned Owl has probably the most diverse habitat and climatic tolerance of any North American owl. It inhabits virtually every type of terrain in North America form sea level to 11,000-ft. elevation. Of the three main requirements being nesting sites, available prey, and roosting sites the Great Horned is very adaptable. If there is a preferred habitat it would include mature deciduous woods with scattered conifers for maximum roosting concealment, that border water with adjacent open habitats for hunting.

— Now you know why Felts Preserve has Great Horned Owls.

**Food and Feeding:** The Great Horned Owl has such a long and diverse variety of prey that it would not be practical to list. It is a very opportunistic forager that generally chooses a perch and scans for prey although it will glide over areas where prey is likely to be, it will walk on the ground, and it has even been reported to wade into the water. Scarcely anything that moves is safe from this owl. It will eat prey as small as insects and scorpions or as large as domestic cats, woodchucks, geese, and Great Blue Herons. This owl’s diverse diet may include small mammals to rabbits, birds, and reptiles to fish and amphibians. It has one of the most powerful grips with its feet of any of the owls. It regularly preys on smaller owls and has been reported to attack and kill even Red-tailed Hawks. It has no predators and will eat anything from crayfish to young foxes.

**Breeding:** The Great Horned is the earliest nesting owl with breeding season from December to July depending on latitude. It usually nests in old stick nests of raptors or jays. Clutch size is usually 2, but can have as many as 6 in years of abundant food. Incubation lasts 28-35 days. The young climb out on nearby branches at 5-6 weeks of age, but do not fly well until they are about 10 weeks old. Subsequent parent care lasts for up to 5 months.

**Movements and Life Span:** The Great Horned Owl is generally regarded as sedentary. Southern populations move very little. The Great Horned have potential for a very long life. Multiple studies show post-fledging mortality for the Great Horned is very high especially in the first 2 years of life. Natural causes include parasitism, disease, and starvation. Road kills, pesticides, illegal shootings, and electrocution are major causes of death in North America. The Great Horned Owl has a maximum recorded longevity record of more than 28 years.

(Description sourced from Owling.com) Top photo by Billie Knight; lower by John Whitehead.
January Bird Walks & Field Trips, Events

Saturday, January 4 — 8:00am
Open House at Felts Audubon Preserve 729-2222

Saturday, January 11 —
- 7:30am …Lettuce Lake trip, Nancy & Bob Dean 792-9235
- 9:00am….Sparrow Drive at Duette Preserve, Marianne Korosy 727-742-1683

Tuesday, January 14 — 8:30am
Emerson Point Bird Walk -- Lucette Wombacher 776-8424

Thursday, January 16 — 6:30pm fellowship; 7pm business meeting with speaker.
featuring images from Ron’s latest global trips. First United Methodist Church, 11th Avenue West, Palmetto

Saturday, January 18 — 9:00am
Jr. Audubon — Steve Black leads student explorers. 376-0110. Meet at Felts Preserve parking lot.

Saturday, January 22-27 —
Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival, Titusville, FL. http://spacecoastbirdingandwildlifefestival.org/

Saturday, January 25 — 8:00am—noon.
- 8am—noon. Siesta Key shorebird walk, Matthew Press 408-390-2004. Meet near the concession
  stand by the public parking lot.
  House (8am—noon). Everyone welcome; bring your own work gloves, bottled water. 729-2222

Sat / Sunday, Feb. 8-9 —
Field Trip: Birds of Prey Center in Apopka. Contact Jim Stephenson 301-466-1973

2013-2014 STANDING COMMITTEES
Beach Nesting Bird Stewardship …… Dee Hanny 745-1553
Christmas Bird Count ……………… Dick Comeau 752-1835
Conservation ……………………. Open 729-2222
Education …………………….. Deb Comeau 752-1835
Field Trips ……………………. Connie Zack 758-2929
Felts Audubon Preserve …………. Tom Heitzman 737-3169
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INJURED BIRD HELP:
Call 778-6324 for what to do.
Someone will call you back.

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