My, how time does fly! Only two meetings left this year. Next meeting Karen Fraley will be reporting back to us on the Give a Child a Ride to the Wild program. I've already looked at pictures, talked to observers and seen teacher evaluations. This will be a meeting you don't want to miss. Which gives me a perfect lead-in!

The “Wild Ride” program was mostly funded by donations received during The Giving Partner Challenge last year. That event will be held in May this year. Once again, all donations made within the first few minutes will be matched...as long as matching funds are available. We'll be talking about how much matching money, the date, procedures, etc. at the April meeting and in emails as we get closer. This is a great opportunity to make your donations really work.

At the same time that we registered for The Giving Partner, at Barbara Singer’s request, the Board had investigated the Manatee Community Foundation as a safe haven for the Society’s money. I’m pleased to tell you that our investments in both the General Fund and the Barbara Singer Memorial Felts Preserve Endowment have done very well. Our terrific treasurer, Lucette Wombacher, will report how well at the April Meeting.

I’d like to call your attention to one more thing, if I may! A lady named Debbie Huckaby has taken on the huge responsibility of rescuing abandoned and abused Parrots, Cockatoos and other exotic birds. She currently is caring for, single handedly, 110 of these beautiful creatures. You can find her web site at http://birdsofparadisesanctuary.blogspot.com . She welcomes visitors to the sanctuary, and it's a great opportunity to get up close and personal to these beauties. She is losing her lease on land where the sanctuary sits. If anyone knows of land that she might be able to use, please contact her through her website or me.

There are lots of good birding opportunities coming up. Between the breeding season and the Spring Migration, it should be a birding bonanza! Sign up for one of our field trips or take one of your own, but get out there and do some birding!

PS—Don’t forget. If you want to help make Manatee Audubon the best it can be, get involved...and get new ideas by attending the Audubon Academy. The event is in Parrish, so you'll be able to easily commute.
Barbara Singer had a dream of sprouting young conservationists by getting them excited & engaged while exploring nature. Felts Audubon Preserve has served as an excellent outdoor classroom to foster this awareness in students from Manatee County. Karen Fraley from Around the Bend Nature Tours will report on the success of our 2013-2014 “Give a Child a Day in the Wild” youth education program at Felts Preserve.
Popular Photo Picks — February Honors

Anhinga’s Catch by Charles Warner (above) captured the top number of votes by attendees at the February meeting of Manatee Audubon. The Bunting Buddies featuring both Painted & Indigo buntings in one image by Deb Yodock (at right) garnered the runner-up honors. Just a reminder, there will be special recognition at our April season finale meeting with Ron Mayberry highlighting the best of all the images submitted this season.

March Open House at Felts Draws Birds & Birders

Don and Bobby Benson guided the bird walk for the OPEN HOUSE event at Felts Preserve on March 1st. Several dozen birders were treated to 43 species. Guests were from Maine, Michigan, Ohio & Texas, not to mention Ontario and lots of the locals. It was a beautiful day. Saw Painted and Indigo Buntings, Red-bellied and Pileated Woodpeckers, Gray Catbirds, Red-shouldered Hawks, Sandhill Cranes, Wood Storks and White Ibis. Had a Roseate Spoonbill in the South Pond along with Tricolored, Little Blue and Great Blue Herons, and the Kestrel was active down that end too. American White Pelicans, more Wood Storks, Monk Parakeets, more Great Blue Herons, Ospreys and both types of Vulture were flyovers. Northern Parula, Eastern Phoebes, Carolina and House wrens were sighted too. I spent 80% of my time in and around the parking area and I saw quite a few of these birds from right there. By going to the South Pond and the bird blind I saw all but about 3 of the 43 total.

The weather was exceptional, the visitors were friendly and the birds cooperated; what more could you ask for? — Article & photos by Deb Yodock
Can’t complain about the weather in Florida, especially this year with our friends & families up north experiencing a marathon winter.

**MABRY CARLTON RESERVE TRIP** — On March 2nd, ten Manatee Audubon members enjoyed the fabulous weather & relaxed birding during a trip to Mabry Carlton Reserve. While on this trip in the 24,565 acre Reserve, 36 species of birds were seen in 2 hours, along with alligators, raccoons, deer, and hog. *(Post by Billy Knight)*

**COCKROACH BAY TRIP** — On February 22, twenty-three Manatee Audubon birders visited the Cockroach Bay Preserve in Ruskin. We were treated to a wagon ride through much of the preserve, viewing 63 species. A FOS (first of the season) Scissor-tailed Flycatcher was seen in flight. Many were impressed with the number of Common Snipes and American Kestrels that were seen.

There are many ponds and marsh areas on the Cockroach Bay Road and the preserve is accessible by foot for birding. *(Post by Connie Zack)*

**EMERSON POINT BIRD WALK** — The Feb. 11th walk at Emerson Point was a picture-perfect day, warm and sunny. Our group of 21 included mostly novice birders and first-time visitors. As a result we saw fewer birds, but there was lots of activity to keep us busy. 23 different species were identified. The only unusual birds were the Piping Plovers feeding along the shore near the Welcome Center.

Cattle Egrets and Ospreys were abundant, but other egrets and herons were elusive. *(By Lucette Wombacher)*

---

**Welcome New Members** —

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ann E Akers</th>
<th>Dr Dudley Fort</th>
<th>Denise Kleiner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary M Breaux</td>
<td>Sharon Foster</td>
<td>Robin Kollar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peggy Engle</td>
<td>Chris Garber</td>
<td>Yolie Mauriz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin &amp; Janet Fitzgerald</td>
<td>Thomas J Johnson</td>
<td>Richard F Moran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Linda Mulvey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sharon Mulvey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Elaine A Olges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ann B Quackenbush</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marjory &amp; Gerald Rand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Michael T Saunders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Susan L Sewell</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bob & Nancy Dean (above center) have fledged scores of birders over their years of teaching the Basic Bird Identification course for Manatee Audubon. The newest brood is featured from the field trips in late Jan & early Feb 2014. Thanks to Bob & Nancy & all those who served as guides on these excellent field trips.
With mixed feelings, the Deans have taught this course for the last time; however, experienced field instructors, Mike and Nancy Barnes along with Steve Black added classroom instruction to their duties.

Developing and teaching this course over these past 12 years has brought us closer to fellow Audubon members with whom we feel a strong affiliation. That and the delight we have seen on the faces of “our new birders” as they see the birds perform as taught, are wonderful memories which will warm us in the years ahead. We are very grateful.

(Article by Nancy Dean)
Exotic Escargot Threatens Florida Snail Kites

The Snail Kite (*Rostrhamus sociabilis*), a crow-sized hawk, is easily identified by the white patch at the base of its tail. You can see that the hooked bill is deep for extracting apple snails and the talons are ideally suited for grabbing. It’s unique curved bill is designed to quickly pluck snails from their shells. Adult males are slate-gray, while females are brown with varying amounts of white streaks on the face, chest and neck; both sexes have red eyes. Young birds, similar in appearance to females, are cinnamon colored with buff streaks.

Snail Kites feed almost exclusively on Apple Snails. Snail kites hunt by flying low over the water while searching for their prey near the surface. Only Apple Snails that are breathing air, laying eggs or crawling in a few inches of water are vulnerable. After capturing an Apple Snail, the Snail Kite pries it open and, using its curved bill, cuts the snail from the shell. Watching a Snail Kite shuck a snail with that highly specialized bill is an incredible experience. This is a bird that has taken eating with utensils to a new level. Sometimes this feat is performed while in flight.

Snail Kites are found in Central and South America, but the Snail Kite in Florida (*R. s. plumbeus*) is the only subspecies found in the United States. Their entire U.S. range is generally restricted to South Florida, where they can be found in shallow freshwater marshes, like those of the Everglades, or along the shallow, grassy shorelines of lakes. Due to drought in south Florida in recent years, many Snail Kites have moved northward to the Kissimmee Chain of Lakes area in search of food. Both habitats have a mixture of short plants and open water, making them great places for kites to see and catch apple snails as they climb to the surface to breathe. All of the habitats dry out periodically, causing snail kites to move around the state looking for good places to eat and breed.

Nesting
These Snail Kites can nest year-round, but the peak season is from February through July. Males can often be seen bringing food or nesting material to females as part of mating behavior. They can also be seen flying a series of short dives and ascents near her. Males do most of the nest building, always choosing sites over water to reduce predator access. In the Everglades, kites tend to nest in short trees, while kites on lakes usually nest in non-woody plants like cattail and bulrush. These nests are more likely to collapse and are vulnerable to high winds, waves and even boat traffic.

Endangered Species
In 1999, scientists estimated that there were over 3,000 Snail Kites in the U.S.; this number dropped to less than 700 by 2009. Although Snail Kites have a widespread distribution in Central and South America, currently there are only around 400 pairs of Snail Kites in the United States, all of the in Florida. And this
Exotic Escargot Threatens Florida Snail Kites, continued

number fluctuates widely according to the availability of the snails. At the current rate of decline, Snail Kites are predicted to be extinct within 30 years, explaining their official designation as an endangered species.

There are 2 major phenomena negatively affecting the population of Snail Kites (and Limpkins):

1. The increased frequency of “dry downs” (where the water table drops below ground level) associated with intensive water control projects.
2. Invasion of larger, exotic apple snails from South America.

Because apple snails have both a lung and gills, which allows them to lead an amphibious lifestyle, this makes the apple snail uniquely enabled to hide underwater from aerial predators, like Snail Kites and Limpkins. This adaptation of the apple snail also allows them to get quite large, providing these birds with an entrée-size serving of escargot.

With the more frequent dry-downs, apple snails are scarcer. Snail Kites have the choice to either migrate to greener pastures or to steal snails. With their shorter bill, Snail Kites have a much harder time getting to submerged or buried Apple Snails, so they sometimes let Limpkins do the dirty work for them, swooping in last-minute and stealing the tasty rewards.

There are four species of apple snail in Florida, but only one is native: Panacea paludosa. Adult kites have adapted to readily eat several species of apple snails, including the non-native Panacea canaliculata, and these adult snail kites depend on it for their diet. For the moment, much of the snail kite nesting in the state now appears to be dependent on exotic snail populations. However, juvenile snail kites have a tougher time grasping the large non-native shells. These young birds just learning to feed themselves may have a difficult time carrying and opening the larger exotic apple snails. — And that’s the problem.

Unfortunately, these larger exotic apple snails from South America are invasive and have been spreading throughout Florida; they are now very common in many of our lakes and wetlands. These exotic snails lay as many as 30 times more eggs, live twice as long, breed more times per year, and are 2-3 times the size of our native Florida apple snails; (see photo showing size comparison).

Florida Apple Snail Project along the Braden River proposed start June 2014

Although Manatee County is not the home for Snail Kites, the invasive apple snails are still a major concern affecting Limpkins, which is a bird of special concern. There are no local (Sarasota/Manatee Counties) studies on the extinction of the Florida apple snail and the effects it has on the future of the Limpkin.

The Braden River has been depleted of water due to development and drought conditions, so when heavy downpours come during rainy season, the small clusters of “bubble gum pink” snail eggs which the Florida apple snails deposited on reeds, docks and other places along the Braden River (and in wetlands, ponds and lakes within the watershed), are inundated and swept away by the flow of water. If the eggs reach the water, they will not survive.

Does the Florida apple snail population effect the Limpkin population in this area?

Many Manatee County birders have noticed a lower number of Limpkins along the Braden River, but research will be needed to find out for sure. Help is needed to count the birds along the Braden River prior to the hatchlings reaching maturity. Watch for more information on this project being spearheaded by the Old Historical Braden River Society in the next several months.
March & Early April 2014 Events

Saturday, March 1
8:00am — Field Trip—Mabry Carlton Preserve, Dee Hanny
8:00am -- Open House Felts Preserve- 729-2222

Saturday, March 8
Field trip Valrico, and birding towards Plant City

Tuesday, March 11
8:30am — Emerson Point Bird Walk, leader: Lucette Wombacher

Wednesday, March 12
5:30pm -- Manatee Audubon monthly Board of Directors meeting (Manatee County Library)

Saturday, March 15
9:00am — Jr Audubon; Steve Black

Thursday, March 20
6:30pm — Monthly MCAS meeting; spkr: Karen Fraley “Give a Child a Ride to the Wild”

Friday, March 21—Sunday, March 23
Field Trip—Webb /Babcock; Corkscrew; Cape Coral Burrowing Owls; Ding Darling Preserve

Saturday, March 22
8:00am — Work Day, Felt’s Preserve 729-2222

Birding Festival: Texas Wildlife & Woodland Festival, Conroe, TX

Wednesday, April 2
9:00am — Shamrock/Venice Rookery -- Amy Miller, 758-7478, febbelle@verizon.net

Thurs—Sunday, April 10-13
Birding Festival: FeatherFest, Galvaston, TX

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

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Don Bansen 794-0255  LaDonne Mayberry 795-4685
Steve Black 376-0110  Amy Miller 758-7478
Dick Comeau 752-1835  Lori Roberts 404-941-4365
Dee Hanny 745-1553  Connie Zack 758-2929

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
Felts Open House ........................ Amy Miller 758-7478
Historian .................................. Don Bansen 794-0255
Hospitality ............................... Betty Sartin 747-0908
Junior Audubon .......................... Steve Black 376-0110
Membership ............................. Lucette Wombacher 776-8424
Newsletter Editor ...................... Lori Roberts 404-941-4365
Newsletter Mailings .................... Betty Benishke 254-7662
Programs ............................... Jim Stephenson 301-466-1973
Publicity ................................. LaDonne Mayberry 795-4685
Strategic Alliances ...................... Lori Roberts 404-941-4365
Webmaster .............................. Collaborative 343-8267

PHOTO CREDITS:

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

Thank You to our Donors
• Carol Webster
• Ingrid McClellan
• James & Nancy Stead
• Dick Johnston