The Night-Heron

Clapper Rail
Photo by Tom Dunkerton
A Bird’s-Eye View... from President Jim

Well, I expect that most of our seasonal members are here now, and I’d like to take this opportunity to welcome every one of them back! To date we’ve had a rather exceptional winter (if you can call it that!), and we’re moving on into a great time of year for birding. Be sure to check our website for upcoming events and field trips. We also have a great meeting coming up in February, so be sure to attend.

Audubon Academy is scheduled for February 28 in Apopka, Florida. We’re trying out a new one day format this year, and the cost is a mere $15. Audubon Academy is a wonderful opportunity to expand your circle of birding and conservation friends, plus you’ll get ideas that will make our Chapter better. The field trips are always fascinating, the discussion and presentations topical as well as interesting. You’ll find a link to the registration website in the email that brings you this newsletter, as well as on the www.ManateeAudubon.org website. Do yourself a favor and plan on attending this year.

All you photographers that amaze us with your fabulous snaps, listen up! A new local photography contest gives Manatee County’s amateur photographers a chance to publicly show their incredible images of Manatee’s natural beauty. You’ll find a link to the details of this contest in the same email.

Regional Conservation Committee Hosted by Manatee Audubon

After an early morning visit to Felts Audubon Preserve, the Regional Conservation Committee reps from various Gulf Coast Audubon chapters gathered on Saturday, Jan. 24th to discuss the Florida Water and Land Legacy and RESTORE initiative updates. Jacqui Sulek & Bob Keim led this meeting which also included Chapter Updates and discussion on projects multiple chapters have in common, as well as areas where it makes sense to work together with other organizations. It’s interesting to note that all of the regions represented are committing heavily to youth education as well as weighing in strongly on local conservation issues.

The Deepwater Horizon disaster had major impacts on the environment and wildlife of the Gulf of Mexico. This followed decades of degradation due to pollution, dredging and overfishing. Through the RESTORE Act signed in July 2012, Floridians have the opportunity of a lifetime to restore the health of the Gulf’s water, beaches, and marshes and the shorebirds and sea life that live there. Restoration of the Gulf of Mexico will be financed by funds from court cases and settlements related to the Deepwater Horizon disaster. The RESTORE Act sets forth the following framework for allocation of the Trust Fund:

- 35% equally divided among the five States for ecological restoration, economic development, and tourism promotion;
- 30% plus interest managed by the Council for ecosystem restoration under the Comprehensive Plan;
- 30% divided among the States according to a formula to implement State expenditure plans, which require approval of the Council;
- 2.5% plus interest for the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Science, Observation, Monitoring and Technology Program within the Department of Commerce’s National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA); and
- 2.5% plus interest allocated to the States for Centers of Excellence Research grants, which will each focus on science, technology, and monitoring related to Gulf restoration.

Audubon Advocates, nature-lovers, and concerned citizens will have a variety of ways to influence how the funds are spent. Three major “pots” of funds are addressed in the RESTORE Act: the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council pot (30%), the equal-share state pot (35%), and the impact-based state pot (30%).
Take a virtual safari with **Rick Greenspun & Barry Rossheim** to explore the birds of East Africa. Hear stories about cultural interactions with Maasai people, and incredible wildlife viewing in beautiful Tanzania to some of the best birding hotspots, including Tarangire Nat’l Park, Ngorongoro Crater, Serengeti, and Arusha. The often overlooked Arusha National Park has an amazing diversity of habitats, which host an incredible list of 400 species in a small area.

Tanzania is one of Africa’s best birding destinations. Slightly larger than the state of Texas, it boasts one of the largest bird lists in Africa and is home to over 1,100 species of which over 800 species are resident and nearly 200 are regular migrants. 22 species are endemic to Tanzania and a further 43 are near-endemic.

From the dazzling and aptly-named **Beautiful Sunbird** to the less lovely **Marabou Stork**, Tanzania offers a world of contrasts that no birder can afford to miss. Key species include: **Buff-bellied Warbler**, the colorful **Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater**, the vibrant **Purple Grenadier**, and the regal **Grey Crowned Crane**.

Rick Greenspun has been an avid birder and Florida resident for over forty years. He has served on the Board of Directors and a VP, Day Trip Leader and Program Director for Sarasota Audubon. Rick has been a classroom and field instructor teaching Beginning Bird Identification classes for Manatee and Sarasota Audubon as well as continuing adult education classes for the University of Florida. Rick owns Sarasota Birding Guide, a bird watching and photography tour company.

Barry Rossheim is also a huge Audubon promoter & contributor. He has led field trips for Manatee, Sarasota & Venice Audubon chapters. He gets kids excited about the world around them...beyond their cell phones! Barry is a Zoology/Biology teacher at Venice High School and has led many international birding trips.

**Feb. 19th Monthly Meeting — Tantalizing Tanzania**

**LOCATION:** Hope Lutheran Church, 4635 26th Street West, B’ton (2 blocks south of Cortez Rd.)

**TIME:** Social fellowship at 6:30pm; speakers start at 7pm.

**SPEAKERS:** Rick Greenspun & Barry Rossheim
On a cold Saturday morning with temperatures below 60 degrees, 2 families came out for an adventure at Felts Audubon Preserve. 5 kids and 2 moms joined Steve Black and Karen Fraley for the “Wild About Birds” themed morning activities.

The day began with a lesson in how to use the new Eagle Optics Denali 8x42 professional quality binoculars. The kids enjoyed being able to see things that were far away “up close and personal”. We went directly to the bird blind hoping it would be warmer inside. Alas, it was actually colder – and the birds were scarce: we saw a pair of cardinals, a few mourning doves and about 25 robins flew into the trees in the background before we left.

Our next adventure was a walk around the north end of Felts Preserve – we identified the native plants along the way and discussed the duckweed that was covering the ponds. This blooming plant is tiny and floats on the surface providing food for ducks and shelter for fish.

We learned that Spanish moss is not a moss, nor is it Spanish. It is a Florida native plant so named because someone thought it looked like a Spanish man’s beard. It is not a moss because it actually has a flower and produces seeds.

At the barn Karen Fraley had a table set up with supplies to make bird feeders. Peanut butter, birdseed, oranges and paper rolls were used along with pinecones that the Adventurers collected at Felts Preserve. When the oranges get eaten out, they will be a nice container for birdseed to be hung in the trees. Our adventurers took some of the feeders home, but also strung them in the trees at Felts to feed our hungry wintering birds. We ate a few oranges for snack as well.

Join us next month on February 14 starting at 9am - Noon as we participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count with the rest of America. Bring a camera, or we will loan you one if you like. Binoculars are always on loan for the day. Register here: http://www.aroundbend.com/audubon-adventures.html

As we rounded the bend from the back fenceline we took this group photo in front of the spectacular wall of Spanish moss.

Congratulations to Venice Area Audubon Society for 50 years of serving the area in education and conservation. National Audubon Society president David Yarnold will be their featured speaker at this key event on Feb. 4th, 2015.

FLORIDA AUDUBON’S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ERIC DRAPER TO SPEAK AT CLIMATE CHANGE FORUM HELD IN SARASOTA

Florida Audubon’s Executive Director Eric Draper will be among the speakers at a Climate Change forum in Sarasota on Thursday evening, February 11th.

For more information visit: http://climatechange.uusarasota.org
South Florida wading-bird nesting dropped 28% last year, according to estimates released January 22, prompting calls to jump start Everglades restoration.

Almost every wading bird species suffered declines during the 2014 nesting season. The nearly 35,000 nests were 19% lower than the nesting total average during the past decade, according to a report from the South Florida Water Management District.

District officials said that the timing of rainfall combined with flood-control measures and other water management factors during the nesting season meant less food for birds and "prompted nest failure and abandonment."

Insuring that wading birds can survive in the Everglades depends on speeding up projects to restore South Florida water flows to replenish habitat vital for feeding and nesting, according to Audubon Florida. "The poor nesting efforts seen this year show that Everglades restoration cannot wait," Tabitha Cale, Audubon Everglades Policy Associate, said in a statement released Jan 22.

Nesting levels for herons and egrets saw some of the largest declines last year.
- There was an 83% drop in Little Blue Heron nests and a 42% decline in Tricolored Heron nests, according to the report.
- Snowy Egret nests decreased 47%.
- After rebounding in previous years, Roseate Spoonbill nesting also declined last year. The 126 nests found in Florida Bay were half as many as the previous year.

The Wood Stork was the only species that increased, with 2,799 nests spotted last year. Wood Stork nesting numbers have increased 26% during the past 9 years, according to the report. Wood Storks did better than other birds last year because they tended to nest later in the December-to-July nesting season and weren’t as affected by changing water levels, according to the water management district.

Slow-moving, multibillion-dollar Everglades restoration efforts involve building water storage and treatment areas to get more water flowing south to replenish the Everglades, instead of draining the water out to sea for South Florida flood control.

**Alert – 28% Drop in So. FL Wading Bird Nesting in 2014**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced on Dec. 9, 2014 official protection for the Red Knot subspecies that migrates along the U.S. Atlantic Coast, listing it as threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

The shorebird, which migrates between northern Canada and southern South America each year, has declined as much as 75% since the 1980s. The National Audubon Society released the following statement: "The eastern Red Knot is a magnificent bird in steep decline," said Audubon VP for Government Relations Mike Daulton. "It needs our help, and Audubon supports today’s listing. Human activities have pushed this shorebird to the brink, but we know that we can make a difference if we act now. Audubon will continue working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other partners to assure the recovery of the Atlantic Coast’s Red Knot."

**You Can Help!** — Manatee Audubon & Turtle Watch will be counting Red Knots starting in the next few weeks. Email ManateeAudubon@gmail.com if you want to help.
From a blustery sunrise to birding to herding cattle, 26 members of Manatee Audubon and their friends travelled to Titusville for an overnight excursion visiting Merritt Island Nat'l Wildlife Refuge (MINWR) and the Viera Wetlands on FL’s east coast.

Along the way we stopped at Joe Overstreet Boat Ramp in search of target birds, Snail Kite and Whooping Crane. While not everyone saw the Whooping Crane, we were rewarded with great views of the Snail Kite.

The next day, with Tom Dunkerton as our guide, we explored Parrish Park, MINWR’s Black Point Drive and Scrub Jay Trail, where we had thrilling views of the Florida Scrub Jay with a final stop & lunch at Cape Canaveral Seashore.

After some chatter around the firepit on Saturday night, we drove out before sunrise on Sunday to Viera Wetlands (near Melbourne, FL) & joined other birders searching the lakes and skies for waterfowl and shorebirds. We had great looks at 4 different American Bittern!

About 5 miles later down dirt roads we arrived at Moccasin Island Tract. But before we could do any birding, we had to drive the cattle down the trail, ergo “herding while birding”.

Many in the group scored life birds including Snail Kite, Whooping Crane, American Avocet, Clapper Rail, Greater Black Backed Gull, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Northern Flicker, American Widgeon, Gadwall, Northern Gannett and American Bittern. Other highlights included Eastern Meadowlark, Northern Harrier, Bald Eagle, Wild Turkey, Crested CaraCara, Ruddy Duck & the Florida Scrub Jay. Even though we saw 96 species, we weren’t finished, yet! Several birders returned to the Joe Overstreet Boat Ramp on their drive back to B’ton for a better look at the elusive Whoopers!

It was a great trip and so wonderful to see Nancy and Bob Dean, as well as munch at Dixie Crossroads & also Chef Larry’s Restaurant in Titusville.

Article & most photos by Kathy Doddridge
The weather on Jan. 13th was much better than the rain during our December bird walk at Emerson Point. We had a nice group of birders, with sightings of Roseate Spoonbills, Woodstorks and several types of herons.

Come & join us for our next guided bird walk on Feb. 10th at 8:30am.

Photos by Bob Wombacher.

Welcome New Members & Thank You to our Donors!!

New Members:
- Everett Burkey
- Melinda Cerny
- Barbara K. Clark
- Tina & David Clark
- Drs. David & Deborah Byrnes
- Nancy Engstrom
- Ed & Amy Francis
- Jill Gorey
- David Gould
- Dr. Angus & Wylene Graham
- John Howell
- Mr. Kim R Jones
- George T & Joanne Kalif
- Susan Kallmeyer
- Kathleen Kies
- Nadine Knapp
- Mary Miedema
- Ginger L & Ray Morris
- Allyn Morrison
- RS Morrison
- Loly Prinik
- Randolph Price
- Susanna Pugh
- Dr. Richard Saddlemire
- Nancy Schibler
- Dell & Linda Smith
- Aileen Turner

Lapsed & Reinstated:
- Jane Pauling
- Howard & Sara Ryskamp

Donors:
- Ann Campagna
- Cheryl Hampton
- Margaret R Kelley
- Lori Roberts
- Jim Stephenson

Favorite Photos — January 2015 Contest Winners

Mr. Painted Bunting has a tendency to grab any birder’s attention, and this month our photo contest winners featured the same bird from a shared trip to Circle B Bar Reserve. But isn’t it fun to see how even the same bird, at virtually the same time can be captured by the lens in different ways. Check out Kathy Doddridge’s image (below left) which won in tight competition with Deb Yodock’s snapshot (below right).

Be sure to share your favorite bird images by emailing them to: ManateeAudubon@gmail.com at least 4 days before our monthly meeting.
A clattering cackle in the salt marsh is often our first clue to the presence of this big rail. The **Clapper Rail** is usually hidden in dense cover, but sometimes we see it stalking boldly along the muddy edge of the marsh, twitching its short tail as it walks, or swimming across a tidal creek. Historically it was abundant on the Atlantic Coast; Audubon reported that it was possible to find a hundred nests in a day, but now much more localized, as coastal marsh has been broken up by development.

**Habitat**
Salt marshes, rarely brackish; locally in mangroves in southeast. Along most of Atlantic and Gulf Coasts, strictly a bird of salt marsh, sometimes in adjacent brackish marsh. In Florida, also found in shallow mangrove swamps.

**Feeding Diet & Behavior**
Includes crustaceans, insects, fish. Diet varies with locality, and includes a wide variety of small prey. Crustaceans often favored, especially crabs, also crayfish and others. Also eats many aquatic insects, small fish, mollusks, worms, frogs. Eats seeds at times. Forages by walking in shallow water or on mud, especially on falling tide or at low tide, picking up items from the ground or vegetation, sometimes probing in mud or water.

**Nesting**
In courtship displays, male approaches female, points bill down, and swings head from side to side; also stands erect with neck stretched, bill open. Male may feed female. Nest site is in clump of grass or other vegetation in marsh, near the upper reaches of high tide, or on bank near water. Nest (built by both sexes, although male may do more) is well-built cup of grasses and sedges, lined with finer material, often with vegetation woven into a canopy over nest. Often a ramp of plant material leads from ground up to nest. Eggs: Usually 7-11, sometimes 5-12 or more. Pale yellow to olive-buff, blotched with brown and gray. Incubation is by both sexes, 20-23 days. Young: Downy young may leave nest soon after hatching. Both parents probably feed young. Parents may brood young in a separate nest from the one in which the eggs hatched. Young can fly in about 9-10 weeks.

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**32 Bird ID Course Participants Refine their Skills**
32 ambitious students from our **Bird ID Class** braved the elements on Jan 24 with their first field trip. The field trip started off at **Felts Preserve**, finishing up at Leffis and Longboat Key. Despite the weather conditions, over **50 species** of birds were seen and identified, including the **male Painted Bunting** at Felts!

**ABOVE: Rick Greenspun points out target bird at Felts Preserve.**
Birders are hardy. We wake up, slug down coffee & breakfast quickly so we can be on the road before the sun rises. We drive to remote places...including the “homes” birds, as well as “homes” of spiders, mosquitoes, ticks, and other assorted critters you’d probably prefer not to admire or invade your private parts. The December 2014 issue of Birder’s Guide to Gear features an article by Sharon Stiteler entitled “Does a Girl Go in the Woods?” Within, she reviews the efficacy of devices manufactured to help women use nature’s facilities more easily. Read the article by clicking here (http://bg.aba.org/i/425921) to access the free e-magazine; go to pages 18-22. You can consider it humor, or a major relief so you can enjoy birding more comfortably. I commend Sharon for having the courage to publically write on such a delicate topic. At least it’s better than sharing this otherwise embarrassing info verbally in a mixed group.

Audubon Academy is Feb. 28th in Apopka

The Central Florida Audubon Academy is scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 28, 2015. This one-day event will be held at the University of Florida’s Mid-Florida Research and Education Center (http://mrec.ifas.ufl.edu) which is located across the street from an American Bird Conservancy Globally Important Birding Area (Lake Apopka Restoration Area.) This year’s Academy has workshops on land acquisition through bequests, pelican and other birds monofilament entanglement, “apps” for birding and birding as an introduction to conservation issues. Registration information is available in the Announcements section of the home page of the www.ManateeAudubon.org website.

Mid-Florida Research & Education Center
2725 S. Binion Road, Apopka, FL 32703-8504 (directions)
Tel (407) 884-2034 • Fax (407) 814-6186 (contacts)

Neal Preserve — Bird Walk Time Change

We will visit this beautiful new preserve in late afternoon, as the sun is setting and the birds are coming in for the night. Since the parking is limited, we will meet at 4:00 pm in the parking lot of the Main Post Office on Manatee Avenue in downtown Bradenton, and carpool to the preserve. For those who prefer to go directly to the Preserve, it is located on the South side of Manatee Ave shortly before the drawbridge to Anna Maria Island. We should arrive there at about 4:20 pm. Neal Preserve has boardwalks and shell paths, and an observation tower. Since Perico Preserve is not yet open, we will only be visiting one location. Give Lucette a call at 941-776-8424 to confirm if you are planning to join this bird walk.

Article by Lucette Wombacher
Manatee County Audubon Society
P.O. Box 14550, Bradenton, FL 34280
Ph: 941-729-2222 www.ManateeAudubon.org

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