Hi there!

I just want to start out by telling you that it’s really not too late yet! What’s that I hear you ask? "Hey Jim, what are you talking about? Not too late for what?"

As you know by now, March is the month in which we nominate new officers and committee chairs for the following year with elections at the March general meeting. We are looking for candidates for the offices of:

- President,
- Secretary,
- Membership recruitment & retention chair, and
- Hospitality chair.

To qualify for secretary, the only requirements are to be able to take 120 words a minute in shorthand and type 170 words per minute. Just fooling, in actuality it takes several minutes for your Board of Directors to wend their way through any given topic giving the secretary more than ample time to take notes on the proceedings. Committee chair is a great way to start assisting the society in a supporting position.

**Without volunteers, societies like ours soon fade away.**

I have posted on the website a very sad email I received recently about the demise of the Old Braden River Historical Society. It describes in graphic detail what happens when members don't step forward to help carry the load of conducting an organization's business. If you would like to discuss helping out in any small way, without commitment, please give me a call at (301) 466-1973 or email me at president@manateeaudubon.org.

**BEST BIRDING MONTHS**

On a lighter note, we are now entering the season of the year when some of the best birding in our area takes place. Make sure you check the event calendar on the website and sign up for one of our many great trips where you'll be sure to see those elusive migrants we don't get a chance to see the rest of the year.

**EDUCATION OUTREACH**

Oooops! Sorry, one more piece of important business. The response that we have received for the trips to Felts preserve for elementary school children that we are sponsoring has been so terrific that the grants that we have received are not enough to cover the current projected cost. If you're thinking about making a donation this year, a gift earmarked "**Give a Child a Ride to the Wild**" would go a long way right now and give some deserving children a great day at Felts preserve.

Happy Birding! (And may the migrants perch right in front of your lenses!)

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Front cover photo of Crested Caracaras by Gerry Mauriz
As a preacher’s kid in Washington state, **John Nelson**’s parents were "assigned" new churches on a regular basis. That meant moving to yet another town and making friends all over again. In 1972 at the age of 16, John’s parents told him to pack for **central Africa**. John’s last two years of high school were spent at Rift Valley Academy at Kijabe, Kenya. Already an accomplished photographer, he turned his cameras to the wildlife that Kenya is famous for. He’s never looked back.

In the states, John has been privileged to take his cameras to nearly every state in the union, but Florida truly is blessed when it comes to the incredible wildlife diversity that one can experience.

In 2008, John made a dramatic change from still photography to high definition video. Video allows you to better capture the behavior of an animal instead of just a moment in time.

To better understand his subjects and the environment, John became a Florida Master Naturalist through the University of Florida. He completed his course work in 2012. Almost every week you can find John out “swamping” throughout the wilds of south and central Florida. Sometimes that means getting wet, while other times it could be hours of sitting in a hot photo blind waiting for that special bird or critter.

John is also the host of "**The Audubon Moment**", for which he won a **Toyota TogetherGreen** grant. Each episode provides listeners with tips on how to identify a specific bird that can be found in Florida. Listen for The Audubon Moment on your local public radio station, or visit the website at: [http://www.TheAudubonMoment.com](http://www.TheAudubonMoment.com)

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**March 19th — “Audubon Moments”**

**Guest Speaker:** **John Nelson**, president Audubon of Martin County; creator of The Audubon Moment

**Location:** Hope Lutheran Church, 4635 26th St. West, Bradenton (approx 2 blocks south of Cortez Rd.)

**Time:** 6:30pm Fellowship  Speaker Starts: 7pm

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Feb. 13th was another cold Saturday morning with temperatures below 60 degrees, but 3 families came out for the monthly Audubon Adventure at Felts Audubon Preserve. 5 kids, 3 moms and one dad joined **Steve Black** and **Karen Willey** for the “**Great Backyard Bird Count**” morning activities.

Each family was offered a Kodak Playsport camera – and 2 borrowed a camera. In the 3rd family both kids brought their own camera. We have asked for them to share a few samples by e-mail. With the 2 borrowed cameras, the families were given the SD cards to keep their photos and use them at home.

Our adventure began with a walk around the south end of Felts Preserve – we identified the native plants along the way and logged the birds we spotted using the Felts bird list provided in the bird blind. Next we stopped in the blind and were rewarded with 11 **Indigo buntings** and the male **Painted bunting** along with 2 females; several **Cardinals** and some **Mourning doves** also made an appearance.

**Article & photo by Karen Willey**
Emerson Point Preserve Hosts 27 Species & 32 Birders

We had a big "flock" of 32 birders for the February 10th Emerson Point Preserve bird walk. About a third of them were visiting the Preserve for the first time. Although it was sunny and mild, it was very windy. As a consequence we only saw two small birds, a pair of Mourning Doves, however, the ponds were full of dabblers and waders. Roseate Spoonbills, Wood Storks and Blue-winged Teals were abundant, along with a nice assortment of herons and egrets. We even got a distant look at a Reddish Egret feeding in the shallows of the Manatee River. A total of 27 species were seen in two hours. Article by Lucette Wombacher

Bennett Park Exploration

Bennett Park:

On a tip from Nick Ziemba, the Knights explored a fairly new park in Manatee County - Bennett Park. In a little over two hours, 48 species were seen, the best being a family of Limpkins and a very active Northern Harrier. This 200 acre park has recreational facilities but is also a conservation area. The park is located at 400 Cypress Creek Blvd., Bradenton, behind Walmart on SR 64. (Article & photos by Billie Knight)

Premiere MCAS Field Trip to the New Neal Preserve

Eleven people showed up for the field trip to Neal Preserve on Feb. 17, despite ominous weather. 14 species of birds were seen in perhaps the shortest field trip of the year. Shortly after the walk began, the rains arrived. None the less, at right is a quick recap of the species recorded.

Special thanks to Lucette Wombacher for heading up this trip!

Article & photo by The Knights

- Turkey Vulture
- Black Vulture
- Common Grackle
- Mourning Dove
- Osprey
- Double-crested Cormorant
- Palm Warbler
- Red-bellied Woodpecker
- White Ibis
- Blue Jay
- Fish Crow
- Common Ground Dove
- Ring-billed Gull
Bird ID Course Participants Refine their Skills

As the sun rose over the Celery Fields Saturday morning, 31 students gathered for their second Bird ID Class Field Trip. After great looks at Sora, Wilson’s Snipe, etc., the group headed to Myakka River State Park. A total of 71 species were seen for the day. Special thanks to Mike and Nancy Barnes and Steve Black for doing a great job teaching the Bird ID Class!

(Article & photo by Billie Knight)

Beach-Nesting Shorebird Signs Installed

Manatee County Audubon extends sincere thanks to Kacy Ray of the American Bird Conservancy for donating two beautiful new signs alerting beachgoers to nesting shorebirds and their young. Also thanks to Debbie Meihls of the Bradenton Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, and our nature buddies at Manatee County Parks & Rec Dept: Charlie Hunsicker, Melissa Nell, Marcus and Mark for helping out on this project. The signs are located at the Visitors’ Center on Holmes Beach (below left) and the 26th Street public beach access on Bradenton Beach (below right). Additional thanks to key local businesses who helped to endorse this project.
The Crested Caracara is a large species of raptor that can reach a body length of 19.7-25.2 inches. It has a dark brown-black belly, wings, back, and crown; and a white lower belly, head, and throat. The Crested caracara also has a bluish-gray to light bluish dark yellow to white bill, red cere (facial skin), and a white tail with dark crossbars. The diet of Audubon’s crest caracara primarily consists of carrion (dead animal carcass), amphibians, reptiles, mammals; eggs; and other birds (Morrison 1996).

The Crested Caracara’s distribution is substantially smaller than historically, when it occupied native prairie throughout central Florida. Caracaras now occur mainly on privately-owned cattle ranches in 10 south-central Florida counties. The species was federally listed as Threatened in 1987 following a steep decline during the late 1960s and early 1970s and was listed by the state of Florida in 1990. Recent population estimates for Florida range from 400 to 1,000 individuals, but this represents a small and highly vulnerable population of no more than 300-400 nesting pairs. There is an increasing need for documentation of home-range sizes and habitat requirements of breeding-age adults and immatures in all seasons to inform management planning and conservation.

While monitoring breeding Crested Caracaras across south-central Florida during 2011 and 2012, researchers Jennifer A. Smith and Micah N. Scholer found Crested Caracara nests in Cabbage Palms (*Sabal palmetto*). Nests are constructed with sticks, dry weed stalks, and long and narrow segments of vine.

Little is known about the reproduction of the caracara. Eggs from caracaras in Florida have been found from September to April, with the breeding season seeming to peak from January to March. The average clutch size is two eggs, with juveniles reaching adult size at five weeks of age, and fledging occurring at seven to eight weeks old.

### Habitat and Distribution
Crested caracara inhabit wet prairies with cabbage palms. They may also be found in wooded areas with saw palmetto, cypress and scrub oaks as well as pastures. Crested caracara are found throughout south central Florida, and also occur in Texas, Arkansas, Mexico, Cuba, and Panama.

### Threats:
The main threat is habitat loss, especially from urban development and agriculture. Due to its isolation and specific habitat dependence, an environmental catastrophe could cause a significant decline in the caracara’s population. Traffic mortality will continue to be a threat to the species as the population of Florida continues to increase and more roads are constructed. Illegal take from trapping is also a threat to crested caracaras (J. Rodgers pers. comm. 2011).
Mark Your Calendars: The Giving Partner Challenge is Sept 1-2

The Community Foundation of Sarasota County is pleased to share that we will be hosting the 2015 Giving Challenge on **Tuesday, September 1 at noon through Tuesday, September 2 at noon.** Once again, this will be an online giving event available to nonprofits with complete and updated profiles in [The Giving Partner](#), featuring foundation challenge support.

As you know, this is a key fundraising event for Manatee Audubon. There are opportunities for matching funds for organizations with folks who jump online during (literally) the first few minutes of the start of this **Giving Challenge** event. So mark your calendars & be ready to use a credit card to make your donation on Sept. 1st promptly at noon.

Funds from this event are allocated partially to **Felts Audubon Preserve** and the Barbara Singer endowment fund, which sometime in the future we hope annual earnings will be able to fund the cost of maintaining & even enhancing our Preserve.

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**Thank You to our Donors!!**

Funding for non-profit organizations is always a challenge. Manatee Audubon is so grateful for financial donations from these folks in the last month.

- Jim Stephenson
- Cherly Hampton
- Ann Campagna
- Steve Black
- Yolie Mauriz

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**March Officer & Board Elections**

Elections will be held in March for the 2015-2016 slate of officers and Board members for Manatee County Audubon Society. **We do not have a complete slate at this time.** Openings remain for the following positions: President; Secretary; Membership Recruitment & Retention committee chair, and Hospitality chair. We urgently need more volunteers to renew the strength of our organization. Please contact Jim Stephenson if you have questions or are interested in growing with us!

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**Favorite Photos — February 2015 Contest Winners**

*Ed Francis* claimed bragging rights for the top 2 images voted as “favorites” at the February monthly membership meeting. The **wood ducks** at Emerson Point Preserve was voted #1, and the gator with **Snowy Egret** #2.

**ABOVE:** Snowy Egret with “smiling” Alligator by Ed Francis
Manatee County Audubon Society
P.O. Box 14550, Bradenton, FL 34280
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Manatee County Audubon Society is a chapter of National Audubon Society Inc.