



Swallow-tailed Kites Handoff. 2013 Chertok Photo Contest First Place Winner, Advanced category. Photo: Marina Scarr

This Month's Program: January 19, 2017

Swallow-tailed Kites by Dr. Ken Meyer

Swallow-tailed Kites arrive in Florida in spring to breed and leave in late summer for their relatively slow annual trip to South America. These beautiful raptors once nested throughout the Mississippi and Ohio River valleys, but almost all breeding sites are now in Florida.

Virtually all of what is known about these raptors comes from the research of Dr. Ken Meyer, co-founder, Executive Director and Research Ecologist at the nonprofit Avian Research and Conservation Institute (ARCI) in Gainesville. Although tracking Swallow-tailed Kites is their greatest research focus, Dr. Meyer and associates also study the Short-tailed Hawk, Snail Kite, Great Horned Owl, Southeastern American Kestrel, Crested Caracara, Northern Harrier, and Bald Eagle. ARCI, a non-profit funded by donations, is also doing research on the Magnificent Frigatebird, White-crowned Pigeon, Limpkin, Wood Stork, Reddish Egret and Great White Heron.

For Orange Audubon Society's January program, Dr. Meyer will share current knowledge of these birds and ask for help in tracking and nest-locating projects next season. He is one of our most popular return speakers. Join us January 19th at 7 p.m. for this fascinating program. See box below for location.

Deborah Green, First Vice President

Orange Audubon Society programs are free and no reservations are necessary.

Programs are the 3rd Thursday of each month (September-June)
and all but June start at 7:00 p.m.
in the Camellia Room at

Harry P. Leu Gardens

1920 North Forest Ave., Orlando, FL 32803

For map and directions, visit:

www.leugardens.org/plan/directions/



Monthly Field Trip: Lake Apopka Wildlife Festival and Birdapalooza Birding Festival

Instead of a regular field trip in January, Orange Audubon Society encourages you to participate in one or more trips at Birdapalooza from January 20-22, 2017. See details on p.6.

Larry Martin, Field Trip Chair

New Year, New Efforts

On January 17, 2017, Orange Audubon Society (OAS) will complete 51 years as your local Audubon chapter. In our second half century of conservation and service, we offer a wide array of mission-driven programs, field trips, classes, workshops and special events.

We are the 3rd largest chapter in the Southeast, with approximately 2000 member households, and the largest chapter run entirely by volunteers. We have a dedicated board and some additional dedicated volunteers, but with plans to develop a nature center in tandem with promoting ecotourism at the Lake Apopka North Shore, we need help from all of our members.

Audubon Florida, at its October 2015 Audubon Assembly, set as one of its conservation priorities Important Bird Areas and waterways conservation on the Lake Apopka North Shore.

From our strategic plan, updated annually at our summer Board planning meeting, OAS focuses on three parks or preserves for our outreach efforts: Orlando Wetlands Park, Mead Botanical Garden, and the Lake Apopka North Shore. We also try to support all of our state parks and county natural lands (Orange County Green PLACES) as places where people can enjoy nature.

Would you consider becoming more active with your local chapter in 2017? Contact me with your thoughts at rbaird4@att.net.

Rick Baird, President

Ecotourism and the Comeback of Lake Apopka

Lake Apopka is making a remarkable comeback. As will be profiled by Friends of Lake Apopka in their January 10th and 11th public meetings (p.5), several factors have contributed to the lake's improved water quality.

The 20,000 acres of Zellwood farms on the Lake Apopka North Shore, acquired by the state and managed by the St. Johns River Water Management District (District), no longer contribute polluting fertilizers. The Marsh Flow-way System and removal of bottom-feeding gizzard shad have helped, as has planting of native aquatic vegetation. In hopes to revive the world-famous fishing of pre-agricultural days, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission has been stocking the lake with largemouth bass.

The number of boat ramps around the lake is still limited, and there is little boat traffic. Photographers have been securing exquisite shots at sunrise and sunset with no human-made objects in view.



Egrets on the Lake Apopka North Shore. Photo: Michelle Nardone.

Birding Hot Spot

Access to the Lake Apopka North Shore by the public has dramatically improved with the opening of the Lake Apopka Loop Trail, a collaboration between the District and Orange and Lake Counties, and in May 2015 the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive (LAWD) by the District. The North Shore was recognized as a Globally Important Bird Area years ago, but now with increased access it has become a "birding hotspot." Over 360 bird species have been recorded, making it one of the best birding sites in Florida (for comparison, Everglades National Park also reports over 360 species and Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge reports 330 species).



Above, Sunrise, Clay Island. Photo: Lynn Marie Folts; Below, Sunset, Magnolia Park. Photo: Jennifer Hew

Protecting the Goose

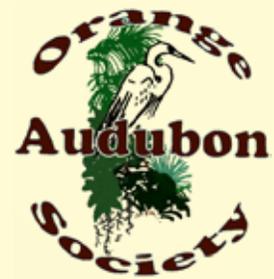
Every weekend a growing group of local birders and photographers visit LAWD. They go for the tranquility, the wide open spaces and the possibility of nature discovery.

Regular visitors see increasing out-of-state plates on LAWD, as the local "best-kept-secret" is a secret no more. For the Apopka area, economically depressed as the farm economy ended, these out-of-town visitors bring in money. They are staying in local hotels and campsites, eating in restaurants, and buying gas and supplies.

Ecotourism is distinguished by its emphasis on conservation, education, traveler responsibility and active community participation. Orange Audubon Society would like to see all proposed activities that are being suggested as ecotourism evaluated against this definition.

We see some of these activities as devaluing the experience of nature for other people, and thus diminishing the resource (*the goose that laid the golden egg*). We hope that elected officials will see that this quiet restoration place attracts wildlife-watchers and through its very tranquility makes communities around the North Shore a really special place, improving the attractiveness of their community.

OAS Conservation Committee



The purpose and dedication of Orange Audubon Society (OAS) is to promote public understanding of, and an interest in, wildlife and the environment that supports it.

OAS' education programs foster the recognition of the tangible and intangible values in the remaining natural areas of Florida and the world, and our responsibility for the conservation of the Earth's natural ecosystems and the services that they provide for the health of the planet.

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The OASis (Orange Audubon Society information source) newsletter is published monthly from September through June. The newsletter is posted on the OAS website and the link e-mailed to OAS members.

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JOIN OAS' [MEETUP](#) GROUP
LIKE OAS ON [FACEBOOK](#)

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Wekiva-Ocala Greenway Florida Forever Project

The Wekiva-Ocala Greenway (WOG) is the ecological link between the Wekiva River basin and the Ocala National Forest. It contains dozens of natural springs, the greatest expanse of sand pine scrub in the world, and Florida's largest black bear population. Many parts are designated Important Bird Areas.

Preservation 2000 and Florida Forever programs (and earlier State land acquisition programs) brought thousands of acres within the WOG into public conservation, through the Division of State Lands and St. Johns River Water Management District, in cooperation with local partners and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. But there are vital missing pieces between the Ocala National Forest and Wekiva Basin GeoParks. Before Florida Forever lost its funding, delineation of the properties necessary to protect the WOG was completed. The project has been ranked 4th in priority under the Critical Natural Lands Projects category of the Florida Forever program.

The Water and Land Conservation Amendment (2014 Amendment 1), which dedicates one-third of doc stamp tax revenues to the Land Acquisition Trust Fund, was intended to fund the Florida Forever program so environmentally sensitive lands like the WOG could be protected.

This year Orange Audubon Society (OAS) wrote to the Acquisition and Restoration Council in support of an amendment to the boundary to the WOG to add a parcel that would be beneficial to the [Wekiva - Middle St. Johns Aquatic Preserve](#). The boundary amendment was approved, but funds to purchase the 45-acre parcel have not been allocated. OAS also wrote to the Lake County Water Authority (LCWA) to encourage it to purchase at least 18 acres to improve the public's access to Lake Norris and Blackwater Creek, a major tributary of the Wekiva River. LCWA purchased this with its own funding. OAS is working with the Wekiva River Coalition to try to move purchases forward. If you wish to help, please email phylliscath814@gmail.com.



Florida Black Bear. Photo: Bea Stein

In case you missed the program ... Impacts of Urbanization and Other Human Influences on Bears by Dr. Daniel Smith

Bear encounters in the Wekiva River Basin as reported in the media and by friends left me wondering what dangers bears pose and face and why they come so close to human habitats. Were a few stray – maybe misfit – bears drawn from the wilds by our bowls of pet food and trash bins, or even our vulnerable small pets? Dr. Daniel Smith, a University of Central Florida wildlife biologist studying the dozens of bears living in the Basin, demystified the situation with his December 15th talk for Orange Audubon Society.

The native Florida habitat preserved in the Basin provides rich supplies of acorns from live oaks as well as shoots and fruits of palms plus cover for bears. They have settled in to live their lives in this ecological paradise.

Dr. Smith's research involves tracking bear movements with collars around their necks and even filming bear's-eye views of the world recorded on cameras hung around the collars. Before this, I had seen the world from a bear's point of view only in cartoon films and storybooks like *The Little Fur Family*, *Goldilocks* and *Winnie the Pooh*. Dr. Smith's videos were a revelation, showing Sabal Palm shoots exposed as paws smashed flat the surrounding fronds and palm hearts were chomped off.

The videos revealed playful moments between mother and cub and between young bears in the woods. And they revealed both day and night approaches and retreats from roads, the bears clearly wary of their biggest enemy, vehicles.

The video clip that made the audience gasp was a bear's view high in a large tree over the roof of a home surrounded by a pool and lawn. I left feeling blessed to have bears in Central Florida as part of the fragments of wildlife that continue to thrive locally and with a fervent hope that wildlife preservation guided by the expertise of professionals remains a cultural imperative here.

Bettie Sommer, Orange Audubon Society member

Get Out and Take Nature Photos!

Orange Audubon Society's (OAS) 2017 Kit and Sidney Chertok Florida Native Nature Photography Contest, is themed: *Florida Native Nature* and has a deadline of April 20, 2017 (postmarked by date). This 29th annual contest is open to all photographers (except members of OAS' board and Chertok contest committee) and there are three skill level competition categories: Youth—for photographers age 17 or younger by April 20, 2017; Novice—for new and less experienced photo hobbyists; and Advanced Amateur/ Professional—for experienced photographers who have practiced and honed their skills over time.

Eligible photos may not include humans, human artifacts or introduced plant or animal species—subject matter must be native to Florida—and entries must be taken in compliance with the [NANPA code of conduct](#). Participants will be notified of any disqualified entries and may optionally replace them at no charge. See contest rules for details. New and bonus prizes in addition to the \$1,200 prize package from OAS and co-sponsor Colonial Photo & Hobby have been added. Tarflower Chapter of Florida Native Plant Society will add \$100 in NEW cash prizes for 1st-3rd place Youth winners.

Photographers in all categories with 1st-3rd place winning images taken on Orange County natural lands (Green PLACES) are eligible for a National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Annual Pass (\$80 value) as BONUS prizes. The list of Orange County's Green PLACE properties is at [this link](#). Orange County Environmental Protection Division is offering a final Green PLACE photo workshop on March 4th to Savage-Christmas Creek Preserve in Christmas.

Entry submission details are now on the OAS website. So get outside with your camera and start shooting and preserving Florida's amazing native nature! Contact me at mwilliams@cfl.rr.com or (407) 644-0796 if you have questions.

Teresa Williams, Chertok Photo Contest Chair



Least Bittern. Honorable Mention, 2015 Chertok Photo Contest, Youth Category. Photo: Mason Theurer

Photography Workshop by Reinier Munguia January 7, 2017, Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive

Orange Audubon Society (OAS) will offer a Photography Workshop on January 7, 2017, led by Reinier Munguia, a well-known and respected photographer who leads workshops to the Galapagos, Costa Rica, Panama, and other locations documenting nature and wildlife's struggles in a constantly changing environment.

Reinier is president of Lake Region Audubon Society and was interim program coordinator of Audubon Florida's EagleWatch program. He is a full-time naturalist and nature photographer whose work has appeared in books, magazines and scientific publications.

A few spots are still available. Choose an indoor session ... or the following field session on the [Lake Apopka](#)



Reinier Munguia, Photo courtesy Reinier Munguia.

[Wildlife Drive](#) and/or trails. Goals are to share techniques to improve the quality of your images through use of proper exposure; share information about the dynamic range of modern digital cameras and use of ND filters; and tips on what gear to take and how to solve problems in the field - harsh light, wind and other elements - that can affect the quality of your images. Proceeds from the workshop are generously being donated by Reinier to benefit OAS' future nature and environmental education center on Lake Apopka.

Class is Saturday, January 7th with indoor portion 9-11 a.m. followed by the field session from 1-4 p.m. Suggested donation for the entire workshop is \$60 (members) and \$75 (non-members); classroom session only, \$30/\$40 or field session only, \$35/\$45. To reserve a space and receive instructions for making payment by check or credit card, contact me at (407) 644-0796 or mwilliams@cfl.rr.com. We hope you take advantage of this workshop, which is limited to 25 participants.

Teresa Williams Chertok Photo Contest Chair

Sunrise Photo Workshop by Milton Heiberg February 19, 2017 Orlando Wetlands Park

Renowned professional photographer and instructor of nature photography Milton Heiberg is teaching a sunrise photo workshop on Sunday, February 19th from 6:00

a.m.- 12:00 p.m. Milton has written 7 books and numerous articles and teaches nature photography at the Crealdé School of Art.

Orlando Wetlands Park (OWP) provides opportunities for beautiful sunrise images. After time in the field, the workshop moves to the OWP education center for a question and answer session, a slide program to emphasize topics covered in the field, and a session on winning images from a judge's perspective. Participants should have a working knowledge of digital SLR photography. Cost is \$70 (members); \$85 (non-members), and class is limited to 12 participants. Contact me at (407) 644-0796.



Milton Heiberg.
Photo: Janice Kunitsugu

Teresa Williams

Birds of Prey Identification Classes, Lake Apopka January 8 and February 5, 2017

Orange Audubon Society will hold two Birds of Prey Identification Classes on the [Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive](#) on Sundays, January 8, 2017 and February 5, 2017. Each class will be from 7:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. You can attend single or multiple days. Suggested donation for each day is \$5 (Audubon members) or \$10 (non-members).

Popular instructor Bob Sanders is an avid birder who for many years has taught raptor identification. Before moving to Central Florida, Bob was co-founder of the Chimney Rock Hawk Watch in Martinsville, New Jersey. No early registration is required. Bob can be reached at (407) 459-5617. See you out there!



Red-shouldered Hawk. Photo: Mary Keim

Friends of Lake Apopka Public Meetings January 10 and 11, 2017

Friends of Lake Apopka (FOLA), founded in 1991, is a citizen advocacy group focused on restoring Florida's 30,000-acre lake to its once pristine condition.

Jim Thomas, founder, was Orange Audubon Society (OAS) president in the 1970s. Past OAS officers were founding members of FOLA.

FOLA will hold two public meetings to discuss current issues affecting the restoration of Lake Apopka, including ecotourism.



The first meeting is on Tuesday, January 10th, 6:30-7:30 p.m., at Tanner Hall, 29 W. Garden Ave, Winter Garden. Dr. Erich Marzolf of the St. Johns River Water Management District will discuss ecotourism and plans for dredging the boat ramp at Newton Park. The second meeting is Wednesday, January 11th from 6:30-7:30 p.m. at the Apopka Community Center, 519 S. Central Avenue, Apopka. Apopka Mayor Joe Kilsheimer will present plans for the Lake Apopka Restoration Center. For more information, [see this link](#).

Limited Edition Field Trip to Smyrna Dunes January 15, 2017

Join popular Orange Audubon Society (OAS) field trip leader Bob Sanders on Sunday, January 15, 2017 for a Limited Edition Field Trip to Smyrna Dunes Park in New Smyrna Beach.

Located on the south side of Ponce Inlet in New Smyrna Beach, Smyrna Dunes Park can be an excellent spot in winter to see various coastal species of birds—gulls, terns, Common Loons, Northern Gannets and shorebirds including the endangered Piping Plover and scarce Purple Sandpiper.

Wintering song birds also can be found in the dunes and mangroves. Bald Eagles, Peregrine Falcons, and lots of Ospreys are usually here as well.

This trip is limited to 15 people and has a cost of \$10 per person per trip for members and \$15 per person for nonmembers. Reservations are required and will be taken on a first-come, first served basis the week prior to the trip. For trip questions or reservations call Bob Sanders at (407) 459-5617.

Orlando Wetlands Park: Recent Sightings

Orlando Wetlands Park (OWP), open this year in winter for the first time, is probably best known for its 1700+ American Alligators. It is also home to a variety of other herps including Pig Frog, Green Treefrog, Pigmy Rattlesnake, and Eastern Ribbon Snake.

At least 225 bird species have been seen at OWP (as reported on eBird).

Some of the more abundant birds at this time of year are Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, American Coot, Green-winged Teal, Blue-winged Teal, Pied-billed Grebe and Black Vulture. Some of the less abundant ones that birders go to OWP to see are Roseate Spoonbill, Purple Gallinule and Limpkin.



Above, Blue-winged Teals with Green-winged Teal in foreground ; Below, Juvenile Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks. Photos: Mary Keim

At least 65 butterfly species have been found in the park. Two of the most abundant as of this writing are Gulf Fritillary and White Peacock. Over 30 dragonfly species inhabit OWP. One obvious species flying now is the Common Green Darner.

Flowers bloom all year at the park. One of the most abundant at this time of year is the bright yellow Burmarigold (*Bidens laevis*). Blooming in the hammocks is the Toothpetal False Reinorchid (*Habenaria floribunda*). Photos of OWP flora and fauna by this author are at this [link](#).

Mary Keim

Birdapalooza Birding Festival, January 20-22, 2017

The 20,000-acre Lake Apopka North Shore area (North Shore), managed by the St. Johns River Water Management District (District), with 360+ species recorded, has been designated an Important Bird Area and with the opening of the Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive, visitors are flocking to the area. Orange Audubon Society's (OAS) idea: Why not have a birding festival and bring in out-of-towners to contribute to the local economy? Elsewhere like Titusville, Florida or Toledo, Ohio, birding brings in a significant income.

Bob Stamps and Loretta Satterthwaite led OAS' effort 5 years ago, in conjunction with then Orange County Commissioner Fred Brummer, to found the [Lake Apopka Wildlife Festival & Birdapalooza](#) at Magnolia Park. With field trips led by District and OAS volunteers, this free family-oriented festival introduces people from Apopka and other Central Florida areas to the North Shore. It is organized by Orange County's Magnolia Park staff, the District and OAS, with partners Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, University of Florida Mid-Florida Research and Education Center, and other entities. The festival last year was on track to attract about 4000 people (before rains rolled in at 2 p.m.).

Last year, in its first Birding Festival on the Friday before Birdapalooza, OAS attracted participants from 10 states, including Florida, and from 24 different Florida cities.

This year Birdapalooza is scheduled a week before week before the Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival so that OAS could book our headliner [Greg Miller](#) (of *The Big Year* fame) and top Florida birder [David Simpson](#). Two full-day trips and nine half-day trips are offered, along with keynotes by Miller and Gian Basili, a long-time District land manager who was instrumental in creating the Lake Apopka North Shore Restoration Area.

OAS' regularly scheduled January program on Swallowtail Kites by Ken Meyer has been included in the birding festival offerings, since speakers, trip leaders and attendees may arrive on Thursday.

For each field trip OAS requests a donation to its Nature and Environmental Education Center Fund. The committee putting this event together consists of Killian Hiltz, Kathy Rigling, Brook Rohman, Teresa Williams and myself, working with Maria Zondervan of the District and the Birdapalooza planning committee.

OAS greatly appreciates the field trip leaders, speakers, and other volunteers who are donating their time. To learn more and register for events (don't wait too long!), go to <http://orangeaudubonfl.org/birdapalooza>.

Deborah Green, Birding Festival Committee Chair



Birdapalooza Help Needed

OAS Conservation Chair Phyllis Hall is now coordinating OAS volunteers for the Saturday Lake Apopka Wildlife Festival and Birdapalooza. Your help would be very useful in set up Friday afternoon, in various efforts during the day Saturday or in taking down the tents and loading up Saturday afternoon. If you would like to help, contact Phyllis at phylliscath814@gmail.com. Thank you!

Flamingo Quest! April 22, 2017 Exciting Event!

Reserve Early to Secure Your Space!

American Flamingos were a rare sight in the wild in Florida for a century *until 10 years ago*. At that time the tall pink and black birds showed up on a South Florida Water Management District (District) property south of Lake Okeechobee. They have been appearing annually by late March and disappearing by mid-May. Exactly where they breed is unclear, but two flamingos with leg bands came from Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula.



American Flamingos at STA-2. Photo: Reinhard Geisler

American Flamingos like mudflats and shallow brackish coastal or inland lakes. The long-legged wading birds have found these habitats in a restricted property that is one of the District's Stormwater Treatment Areas (STAs) south of Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades Agricultural Area. STAs are designed to filter and clean water flowing south through the Everglades.

The location where the flamingos have been seen within the 15,500-acre STA-2 was kept secret until it was leaked two years ago. Fearing that unregulated visits would disturb the birds, the District asked Audubon Society of the Everglades (ASE) to organize weekend tours of the area. The first year these trips filled immediately and had a long waiting list. Orange Audubon Society (OAS) member Reinhard Geisler (our November speaker) was fortunate enough to hear about the trips and took the photograph above. Now ASE prefers working with other chapters to organize group trips.

OAS has booked Saturday, April 22, 2017 from noon to 4 p.m. for the 20-mile loop tour into STA-2. Please be aware that there is no guarantee that we will see flamingos, as they do move around. Last year with heavy rains in the winter, water levels in the spring were too high for the flamingos in early April when we went, although flamingos were seen later in April. Fortunately, STA-2, which is managed for seasonal waterfowl and alligator hunts, has many other exciting birds at that time of year, more species reported than any of the other STAs. To help us find great birds, OAS has again booked David Simpson, one of Florida's top birders, who has extensive field experience in South Florida.

We will meet at noon on Saturday, April 22nd at the entrance to STA-2 and carpool into STA-2, four per car. The trip from Orlando is approximately 3 1/2 hours. This can be a day-trip. However, since April 22nd is during spring migration, the trip will include additional birding with David after we leave STA-2 through Sunday about 4 p.m. Possible locations for Saturday afternoon and Sunday birding are Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, Spanish River Park, Snook Island Preserve, Green Cay Nature Center and Wetlands, Wakodahatchee Wetlands and others, to be narrowed down based on reported sightings.

The weekend-field trip fee is \$40 for Audubon members and \$55 for non-Audubon members, covering trip leaders' time, contributions to ASE and to OAS to assist our fund-raising toward a nature center. The Saturday-only field trip fee is \$25 for Audubon members and \$40 for non-Audubon members.

Early registration is recommended as the field trip is limited and reservations are required. Contact Teresa at (407) 644-0796 or mwilliams@cfl.rr.com for space availability and registration and payment instructions. Full payment is needed to confirm your spot. Cancellation and refund policies will be provided in the February *OASis*. Participants are responsible for meals, transportation, lodging and incidentals. If requested by 10+ registered participants, OAS will try to secure a discounted group lodging rate for Saturday night in the Boca Raton area as we did last year. Think pink!

Christmas Bird Counts

2016 marked the first new Christmas Bird Count (CBC) in many years, the inaugural Christmas CBC (with the 15-mile diameter circle centered on the town of Christmas). As reported by compiler Karen Hamblett, 129 species were seen, including Snow Goose, Greater Scaup, Canvasback, Bufflehead, Short-tailed Hawk, Black-necked Stilt, Reddish Egret, Lincoln's Sparrow, and Yellow-throated Vireo. Mary Keim and Randy Snyder found the first recorded Swamp Sparrow at Christmas/Savage Creek Preserve, and witnessed and photographed a massive number of Tree Swallows vortexing.



Tree Swallows at Savage Christmas Creek Preserve. Photo: Mary Keim

For the Wekiva CBC total species are not yet available, but compiler Jay Exum reports that unusual sightings included Snail Kite, White-winged Dove, Common Goldeneye, and Orchard Oriole.

The Econlockhatchee CBC had at least 134 species (with several data sheets still not turned in). Highlights were Roseate Spoonbill, Least Bittern, Rusty Blackbird, Least Flycatcher, Vermilion Flycatcher, Lincoln's Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Caracara, and Short-tailed Hawk.

The Kissimmee Valley CBC tallied 133 species with new birds to the count being Dunlin, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, and Florida Scrub-Jay.

The Zellwood and Clermont CBC data will be reported later.

Deborah Green

Deborah Green

Florida Panhandle Red Hills Trip Recap

When the first European settlers arrived in the Southeastern United States, forests of longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*) covered a broad swath from eastern Texas to Virginia. Of an estimated 90 million original acres, as little as 12,000 acres remain. Older trees can grow to heights of 60 to 70 feet, with some specimens living more than 500 years and growing to widths of up to three feet. The longleaf pine's hard heartwood was highly valued for construction, and the tree's resin-rich wood was a good source of turpentine. After timbering, settlers cleared undergrowth and planted faster-growing slash and loblolly pine or cleared the land for pasture or crops. Here in Central Florida, Wekiwa Springs State Park and other parts of the Wekiva River Basin State Parks host longleaf pines, but all are second growth from logging ending in the 1930s or later.

The Florida Panhandle's Red Hills Region, a 300,000-acre area between Thomasville, GA and Tallahassee, FL contains a significant portion of the native longleaf pines remaining in the United States and the largest contiguous acreage on privately-owned land. Wealthy landowners from up north had purchased large forested tracts and carefully managed them for the propagation of Northern Bobwhite for quail hunting. Red Hills hunting plantations, well-managed with prescribed fire imitating nature's fires, are home to ~64 federally threatened and endangered plant and animal species.

Tall Timbers Research Station (TTRS) was established in 1958 and is a widely regarded information resource for fire ecology, game bird management, vertebrate ecology and forestry. Jim Cox, director of TTRS' vertebrate ecology program, had hosted Orange Audubon Society's trip in 2014 and again was our host this December. Jim showed us the Brown-headed Nuthatch and demonstrated banding of wintering Henslow's Sparrow, a life bird for many of the group and one of the trip's highlights. He provided a tour of the Stoddard Bird Lab with its incredible taxidermy bird collection, including the now extinct Bachman's Warbler.

Another highlight of the 3-day trip was the private tour at Seacrest Wolf Preserve. You did not have to be a dog-lover to be enthralled by one-on-one encounters with resident Arctic and Grey wolves and smaller animals. If there is demand, we will run this fun trip again another year.

Teresa Williams



Above, Brook Rohman and Lori Mathis with 500 year-old longleaf pine at a private tract near Tall Timbers. Photo: Susan Kirby. Specimen of the now extinct Bachman's Warbler shown by Jim Cox at Tall Timbers Research Station. Photo: Teresa Williams.

JANUARY/FEBRUARY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Photography Workshop - Reinier Munguia, Lake Apopka

January 7, 2017
Contact Teresa at (407) 644-0796

Birds of Prey Identification, Lake Apopka

January 8, 2017
Contact Bob at (407) 459-5617

Limited Edition Field Trip to Smyrna Dunes Park, New Smyrna Beach

January 15, 2017
Contact Bob at (407) 459-5617

January Program: Swallowtail Kites - Dr. Ken Meyer

January 19, 2017
Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

Lake Apopka Wildlife Festival and Birdapalooza Birding Festival

January 20-22, 2017
Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

Lake Apopka Wildlife Festival and Birdapalooza

January 21, 2017
Contact Phyllis at (407) 265-7164

Birds of Prey Identification, Lake Apopka

February 5, 2017
Contact Bob at (407) 459-5617

February Program: Our Amazing Arachnids: Florida's Spiders and Their Kin - John Serrao

February 16, 2017
Contact Deborah at (407) 637-2525

Monthly Field Trip to Joe Overstreet/Lake Kissimmee, Kenansville

February 18, 2017
Contact Larry at (407) 647-5834

Sunrise Photo Shoot - Milton Heiberg, Orlando Wetlands Park

February 19, 2017
Contact Teresa at (407) 644-0796

Limited Edition Field Trip to Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge

February 26, 2017
Contact Bob at (407) 459-5617