



Audubon FLORIDA Naturalist

Spring 2014

Celebrating Our History
Shaping a Hopeful Future



Artwork by John Costin

2014 Florida Audubon Society Leadership

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Cover art by John Costin
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A resident of Ybor City (Tampa), John's art captures rich and diverse bird life and other subjects throughout Florida.

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Photo By Ralph Anwood

**John Elting, Chairman,
Florida Audubon Society**

Dear Audubon Members and Supporters:

On the cover of a recent Audubon publication was a quote from John Muir, one of my life-long heroes.

"I only went out for a walk, and finally concluded to stay out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in."

We members and supporters of the Florida Audubon Society have a lot to celebrate: the completion of the C-111 Spreader Canal, the first CERP program to be completed diverting water to Taylor Slough and Florida Bay; the Tamiami Trail Bridge; construction of the C-43 Storage Basin to mitigate the Caloosahatchee watershed; the restoration via rehydration of the Picayune State Forest; the Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge to preserve lands and water north of Lake Okeechobee; and the Florida Water and Land Conservation Initiative on the ballot in November to purchase and protect our natural resources.

All of the above are policy victories to be sure, hard fought and earned, but let us not forget those words from John Muir about "really going in". We as conservationists spend countless hours reading articles, journals, e-mails, and talking on cell phones. When was the last time we employed all our senses? When was the last time we touched the under-leaf of a Satin Tree, or caught the scent of crushed Lemon Bacopa between our fingers, or bit off a bud of Spanish Needle to chew, or tracked a cat, or lay down for a nap in the shade of an oak hammock? We owe it to ourselves for all the policy and public education work we do to take the time to re-energize, to recharge our senses, to renew our commitments.

I opened with a quote from John Muir. Let me close with Emerson.

"In the woods we return to reason and faith. There I feel nothing can befall me in life---no disgrace, no calamity---which nature cannot repair."

Best to all,

John W. Elting,
Chairman
Florida Audubon Society

Audubon Florida's Everglades Program and Executive Offices are moving.

Effective April 15, 2014,

Audubon Florida relocated our state office to:

4500 Biscayne Blvd, #205
Miami, FL 33137

The new efficient workspace supports staff and volunteers and saves on rent.

Our phone number will not change. It remains (305) 371-6399. For a full directory of Audubon Florida's staff locations and phone numbers go to <http://fl.audubon.org/node/19446>

Learn more at www.GivetoAudubonFlorida.org



*Eric Draper, Executive Director
Audubon Florida*

Walking in the Footsteps of Legends

This year Audubon celebrates some important Florida milestones – the Coastal Island Sanctuaries were founded 80 years ago, the Everglades Science Center was established in the Florida Keys 75 years back and the old growth cypress forest at Corkscrew Swamp was saved 60 years ago.

These anniversaries are meaningful because they cause us to consider the courageous acts of people who came before us. We walk in their muddy tracks. We carry forward their vision for Florida conservation. We add to their accomplishments and defend their gains.

Audubon is an organization of stories. John James Audubon came to Florida to see bird colonies. Our founders met in a house in Maitland to charter Florida Audubon Society to fight the plume trade. Wardens Guy Bradley and Columbus McLeod were gunned down by poachers. Sanctuaries and research stations were established around Florida, driving important early decisions such as establishment of the Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge.

It is an exciting history and takes in so much more. More than one-fourth of Florida's land area is managed for conservation, the state water policies are among the nation's best, and our wildlife rules increasingly favor species protection.

Audubon leaders – hardworking and motivated volunteers and staff – have been involved in each and every important conservation initiative.

It is more than a cliché to say, “Don't rest on laurels.” Better to remember these stories as a way to stay focused on these very ambitious goals that motivated those in whose footsteps we walk.

We must think big. As the state program of National Audubon Society, we are aligning our Florida work to accomplish these goals as part of a vision of interconnected efforts along the hemispheric Atlantic Flyway.

At this time of the year when we see so many birds hurrying north or nesting to ensure species survival, we remember that our heritage requires that we step up. It is my hope that Audubon provides you with many choices on how to make a difference. Big or small – make a difference! Thank you.

Eric Draper
Executive Director
Audubon Florida

Today's Goals Inspired by Those Who Walked Before Us

- Protect and restore wetland habitats throughout the Everglades and other special places guided by a strong commitment to science, sustainable land management and restoration and protective water laws.
- Manage important coastal bird nesting sites and migratory stopover areas to recover numbers and diversity of wild birds.
- Use our sanctuaries, centers and social networks to inform, educate, inspire and engage people in meaningful conservation work.
- Connect people of all ages and backgrounds with Florida's special wildlife habitats to instill passion and support for personal conservation and good public policy.
- Double our volunteer force of 1000 plus passionate citizen scientists, habitat stewards and trained grass-roots advocates.



Coastal Bird Stewardship

Protecting the Treasure on Florida's Beaches and Coastal Islands

Eighty years ago, Audubon's first coastal wardens were established in Tampa Bay to protect the wading birds on Whiskey Stump Key and other coastal islands. This effort has grown and expanded to a statewide coastal program.



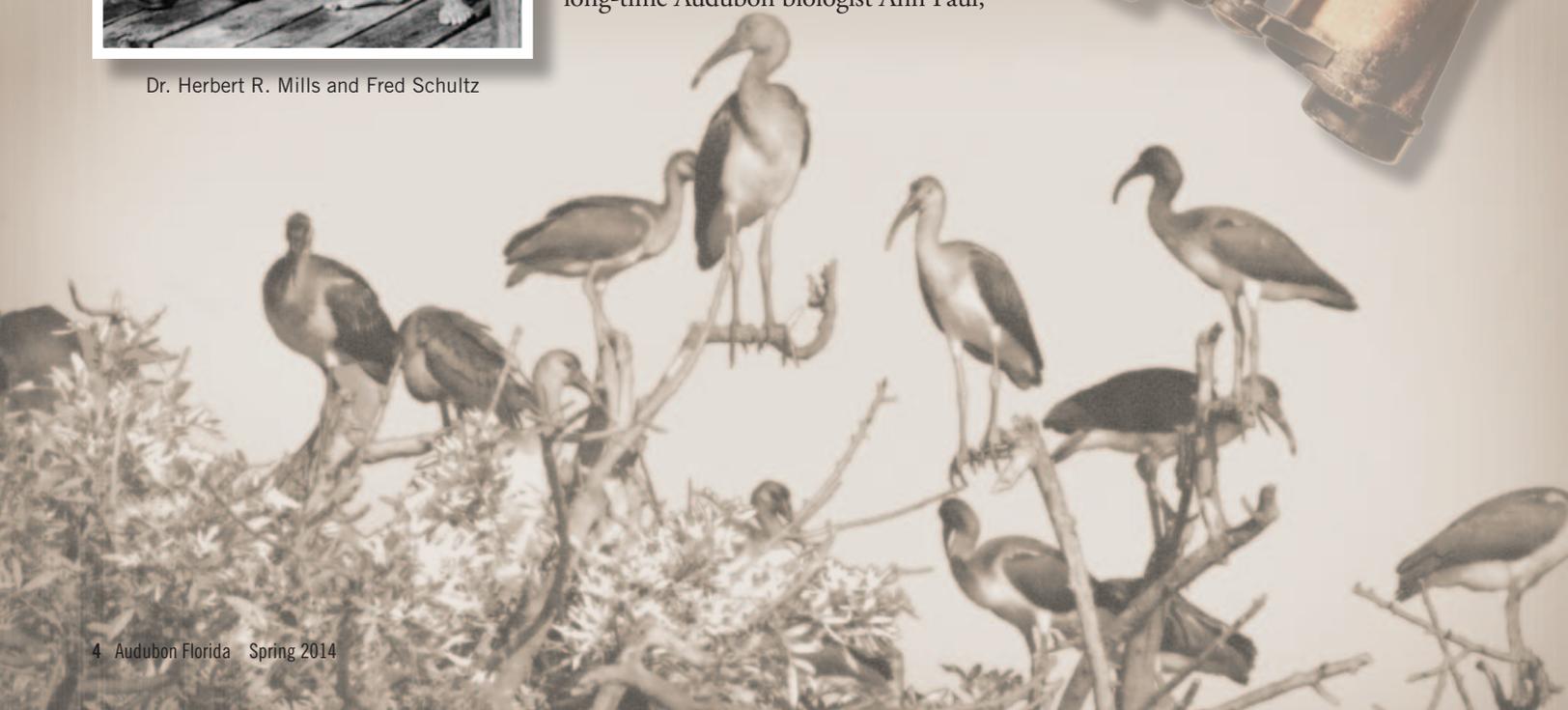
Dr. Herbert R. Mills and Fred Schultz

This spring, Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries will celebrate its 80th anniversary. In 1933, Dr. Herbert R. Mills traveled from Tampa to a bird colony "in the wilderness of Hillsborough Bay". The nesting herons and ibis on Green Key had been shot and chicks were dying in their nests. A member of the Florida Audubon Society, Mills funded bird warden Fred Schultz beginning in early spring 1934, to post and patrol Green Key and the Alafia Bank, a role he served for 29 years. Schultz intercepted plume hunters seeking "Great Whites" for their courtship feathers, hungry poachers eager to collect ibis young for "curlew purlew," and recreational gunners targeting adult birds flying back to the colony to feed their young.

Since then, 31 staff members have served the Sanctuary as wardens and sanctuary managers. Today, Sanctuary Manager Mark Rachal leads colony management and monitoring, and habitat restoration projects at Audubon bird colonies along Florida's west coast, together with long-time Audubon biologist Ann Paul,

dedicated volunteers and Project Colony Watchers. Thirty species, including some of Florida's most beloved and rarest birds, nest on Sanctuary-managed colony islands in estuaries and inland lakes, with a population totaling over 55,000 pairs.

While the threats may have evolved since the 1930s, the needs of Florida's iconic coastal birds are just as urgent today. The legacy and vision of Herbert Mills echo in Audubon's modern-day statewide coastal program, responding to the birds' needs in the face of habitat loss, disturbance and the Deepwater Horizon tragedy.



Restoring the Gulf: Four Years Later

Four years ago oil washed onto Gulf beaches and Audubon mobilized thousands of volunteers to respond to the tragedy.

In the wake of the Deepwater Horizon disaster, Audubon emerged as the organization with the knowledge, network, experience and reputation to truly make a difference for coastal bird recovery. With more than 100 years of experience shepherding Florida's coastal birds, our vibrant Florida Shorebird Alliance partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the support of skillful bird stewards and colony watchers, Audubon was best positioned to identify emerging threats to the birds and propose a path forward towards restoration and sustainability for the Gulf's bird populations. Together with our colleagues in the other Audubon Gulf state offices, we created a roadmap for bird restoration, "Restoring the Gulf for Coastal Waterbirds: A Long-term Vision," which has become a touchstone for our lobbying efforts and a resource for our staff and partners alike.

Most significantly, we identified the need for long-term management funding for the birds—protecting them and their habitat from disturbance and predation every year—and have been successful in attracting early restoration funding from both the Natural Resource

Damage (NRD) Trustees as well as from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. We view these projects as demonstrations of what needs to be supported annually, in perpetuity, Gulf-wide if we are truly committed to restoring the Gulf's waterbirds.

Today between our historic and newly added sites, Audubon is working with volunteers and agency staff to protect coastal birds at more than 140 sites in Florida, ranging from solitary oystercatcher nests warded by the staff of the Florida Coastal Island Sanctuaries, to the beach nesting colonies of Southwest, Northwest and Northeast Florida, to a new rooftop nesting bird program in the Florida Panhandle.

Our experience and broad chapter network are proving key to restoration on another front as well: "restoration" in the context of the Deepwater Horizon disaster includes not only ecological restoration, but also economic and recreational restoration. There is great potential for projects serving these diverse ends to work at odds with one another and we have already seen this come to pass in the third round of Natural Resource Damage Assessment Early Restoration project proposals. Thanks to our on-the-ground experience, our knowledgeable chapters and savvy policy team, we were able to identify proposed projects which would harm birds and



Restoring the Gulf for Coastal Waterbirds:
A Long-term Vision

Natural Resource Damage Assessment Early Restoration



advocate for their modification. Special thanks to Francis M. Weston Audubon for their leadership and advocacy during the public meeting held in Pensacola on these projects!

First the spill hurt the Gulf's birds, then the spill response harmed them. Our new concern is ensuring the birds don't endure further insults at the hands of "restoration." We are on the verge of great opportunity for the Gulf's waterbirds and are grateful for the help of our broad network of partners and volunteers in making sure that restoration is genuine and lasting.

Florida Coastal Island Sanctuaries 80th Anniversary Celebration

Sunset cruise to
Richard T. Paul Alafia Banks Bird Sanctuary
May 8, 2014, 5 to 8 p.m., Tampa, Florida

Join Audubon on a cruise aboard the Florida Aquarium's Bay Spirit II and watch thousands of birds return to the nest. The Sanctuary, owned by The Mosaic Company, is managed by Audubon. Reservations are required as boat space is limited. An \$80 minimum donation is recommended. For details contact Ann Paul at apaul@audubon.org or (813) 623-6826. Sponsored by The Mosaic Company, TECO Energy, Inc., Mallory Lykes and David Belcher, Barbara Sheen Todd, and Janet and John Costin.



Black-bellied Plover



Seventy-five Year Anniversary

of Audubon's Everglades Science Center at Tavernier

It is incredible to imagine what it must have been like for Robert Porter Allen, Audubon's first director of research, as he ventured across the purple skies and rolling aqua waters of Florida Bay by boat in the 1930's. He was driven by a curiosity to better understand the mysterious world of wading birds and migratory birds within the final sojourn of the River of Grass to Florida Bay. When he established an avian research outpost in the Florida Keys in 1939, Allen started a legacy of Everglades science and data driven policy that our Audubon science team continues to this day.



The Tavernier Science Center in its early days. The Center has recently been renamed the Audubon Everglades Science Center at Tavernier.

Generations later, Audubon scientists still traverse the bay finding answers to the puzzle of restoring the River of Grass. Acclaimed scientist Dr. Jerry Lorenz leads Audubon's research to understand the effects of restoration of freshwater flows into Florida Bay on key habitats for iconic indicator species, like the Roseate Spoonbill. Water and fish samples and observations of plant and animal life are brought back to the historic science center. At the center, data is entered into computers, analyzed, and shared with other scientists and state and federal agency decision-makers.

The purpose of the research is to track the measure of our ecological health. Wading birds once nested in large, thriving colonies in the Southern Everglades and Florida Bay. But over the past century, their impressive numbers dwindled as canals were built to divert water from the Everglades to the coast. This left vital habitat parched and in poor health. Roseate spoonbills, as well as being the iconic pink Everglades wading bird, are a key indicator species for the health of Florida Bay. They depend on a habitat supported by freshwater flows from the River of Grass. If they are successful, it means the ecology of Florida Bay is improving.

Robert Porter Allen's spoonbill drawings from the field.



As Everglades restoration projects are completed, Audubon's Science Center is more valuable than ever. Preliminary data gathered in the coastal zone suggest that getting fresh water back into the Everglades is producing excellent ecological results. (See next article.)

In February, volunteers from the Wells Fargo Green Team participated in a renovation of Audubon's historic Everglades Science Center at Tavernier in the Florida Keys. Tireless individuals provided the human power needed to clean, paint, caulk, and replace floors. Many people helped - even Audubon Florida board member Steve Lynch joined the team to roll the final coat of paint on the building.

The Everglades Science Center is the headquarters and laboratory for Audubon's Everglades Science Team. Audubon would like to thank Wells Fargo's Green Team and the donors who supported this project. Of course, we can't forget to thank the dedicated Science Center staff who joined volunteers two Saturdays in a row. Here's to another great 75 years!

The Everglades Team:

Using Science and Advocacy to Shape Restoration Decisions

Fourteen years ago Congress and the Legislature approved the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan with guidance from Audubon scientists and support from Audubon advocates. This bold plan aims to restore the long degraded River of Grass to its natural splendor through projects, adaptive management, and sound science. Imagine the future when the 60-plus Everglades restoration of CERP are complete. Miles of blue skies will be dappled with thick clouds of Roseate Spoonbills, Great Blue Herons, Egrets, and Ibises soaring across the famed River of Grass.

No one said this will be easy. And it definitely will not be fast. As the largest ecosystem restoration project in the world, our work is ahead of us.

But guess what? We are already seeing the results. Just over a year ago, our Audubon Everglades team attended a ribbon cutting for the C-111 Spreader Canal Western Component in the Southern Everglades. This project created a hydraulic ridge to hold and push freshwater into Taylor Slough, an important flow way that carries water through the heart of Everglades National Park into Florida Bay. Water is now able to filter into the ground, rehydrating Taylor Slough and surrounding wetlands.

Audubon's Everglades Science Team is measuring the effects this project is having on the ecosystem. Their preliminary data already suggests measurable improvements in the area where the C-111 Spreader Canal Western Project is operating. In the past year, Audubon

researchers documented greater water flow and improved salinity levels in northeast Florida Bay. These conditions are improving critical habitat for Roseate Spoonbills.

As Everglades restoration continues, our science and policy staff are on the frontlines measuring success through data driven processes, finding ways to adapt and manage to changing conditions, and fighting for the necessary funding and political will to get the job done.

Everglades Victory: Central Everglades Planning Project Gets State Support

On April 11, Everglades restoration's most ambitious project gained an important victory. A motion by South Florida Water Management District Governing Board Members Glenn Waldman and Sandy Batchelor was unanimously approved, committing the State of Florida as a partner in the Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP). When implemented, this project will deliver long awaited benefits for the Everglades and for our coastal

waters. The construction of CEPP is one of Audubon's top priorities for the Greater Everglades Ecosystem.

Letters, phone calls and emails from Audubon advocates helped build support for this project. Passage shows Florida's willingness to advance restoration. It was a remarkable victory for Everglades birds and wildlife.



Photo by Reinier Munguia

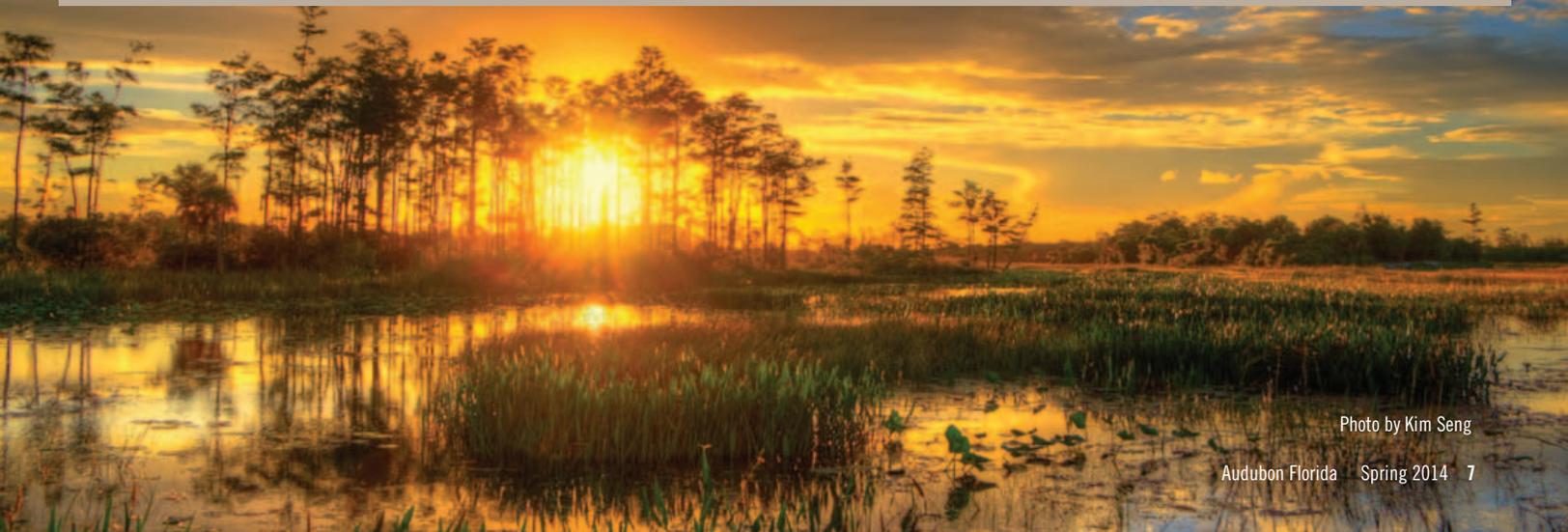


Photo by Kim Seng



Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary: Providing Leadership for Wetland Restoration

Celebrating 60 Years of Conservation Success: Sixty years ago people from all over America pitched in funds to buy the last stand of old-growth cypress at Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, at one of the most important wading bird rookeries in the nation, including Corkscrew's beloved Wood Storks. In the intervening decades, the natural habitat that once surrounded Corkscrew's treasured forest has been drained, filled, fragmented and de-



graded. What remains in the western Everglades is insufficient to sustain our wildlife. So today we are engaging new heroes to answer the call of conservation once again as we restore wetland habitat and bring back Wood Storks and wading birds.

During the past 60 years, dedicated wardens and land managers have served as stewards of the Sanctuary. Audubon scientists have contributed to our understanding of the ecosystem, naturalists and educators have inspired the public and improved ecological literacy, while our policy team has guided legislation, fought poorly conceived and harmful developments and informed decision makers. Despite these efforts, more is needed.

Our iconic wading bird, the endangered Wood Stork, nested at Corkscrew this year and foraged in nearby nearby wetlands to feed their young. Yet this was the first year they had nested in the Sanctuary since 2009. Given the storks' status as indicators of wetland health, this is an exceptionally troubling

trend.. The bald cypress forest, nesting wood storks and quality wetlands, dense with forage fish, are vital links in the Corkscrew and Big Cypress ecosystems. Audubon's science-based protection and restoration efforts are saving and recovering these healthy wetlands to make wading bird colonies abundant again. Audubon's advocacy and education programs must build the public and financial support necessary to advance this goal.



Imagine the Future:

Corkscrew Launches Campaign to Restore 1000s of Acres of Wetlands

Imagine a landscape where thousands of acres of shallow wetlands have been restored. These lands, when connected to existing native habitat, will expand and enrich the mosaic of diverse wetland types, improve water quality, recharge aquifers, attenuate floods, re-establish lost wildlife corridors, and grow fish and invertebrates to support sustainable communities of wading birds, including the endangered Wood Stork.

Over the past five years, Audubon science and policy teams have worked to improve protections, promote restoration and prioritize acquisition of shallow wetlands among various stakeholders throughout Florida, including all levels of government, environmental organizations and the private for-profit sector. These efforts have set the stage for our current conservation vision to restore three square miles of shallow wetland habitat in the next five years, and to effect meaningful policy change in permitting and mitigation with local and national significance.

To this end, Audubon has formed partnerships with like-minded entities to identify parcels of land with high potential for the restoration of shallow wetlands. We are working with Lee County to restore 242 acres of fallow farm fields within the Wild Turkey Strand Preserve. We are also working with the Panther

Island Mitigation Bank to convert another 397 acres of degraded farm fields back to shallow wetlands within the 13,000 acre Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. Rigorous scientific monitoring is being enacted to measure success, and will be used to define and refine best restoration and mitigation practices.

Next in line are three other degraded Corkscrew parcels totaling 130 acres. In addition, Lee County has hundreds of acres of additional holdings within their stable of conservation lands which fit the profile of fallow farm fields with high restoration value, but the County

does not have the capital for restoration. These are opportunities for Audubon to step up and step in to design and implement targeted ecological restoration that revive the western Everglades.

Landmark Cypress Receive New Recognition

Corkscrew's old-growth bald cypress forest represents less than two percent of the old-growth bald cypress present in Collier County in the 1850's. It is now the largest remaining virgin bald cypress strand in the world, and the east coast's answer to the west coast's redwoods, cousins to the bald cypress. Audubon biologist Dr. Mike Knight has undertaken a survey to locate and map the largest trees in this historic stand. With more than 430 acres currently mapped, Dr. Knight and his research team have discovered 39 giant old-growth cypress trees, ranging from 17 to 23 feet in girth.

In honor of the 60th anniversary of saving the forest, we launched a Landmark Cypress program that celebrates our mighty trees and invites visitors to "see the forest through the trees." New educational materials about the Landmark Cypress trees are available in the Blair Audubon Center, enlightening visitors and encouraging them to experience the boardwalk in a new way. We notice that Corkscrew's visitors now look up at the magnificent giants as often as they formerly looked down to spot critters and flowers. The forest in its entirety is newly appreciated in all its wonder.



Photo by Dennis Goodman

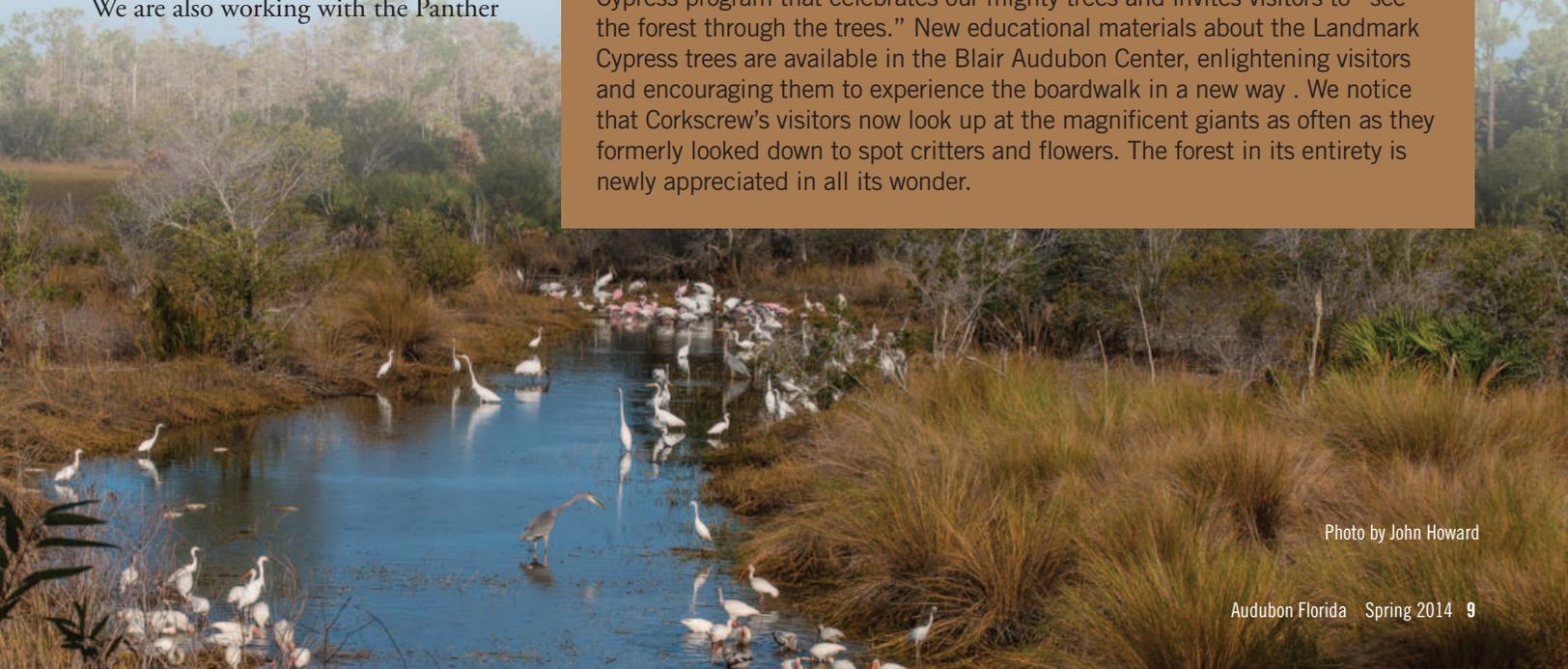


Photo by John Howard

Citizen Science:

A Historic Tradition Plays a Greater Role



Photo by Anita Cooney

EagleWatch volunteers at work in Ruskin, Florida.

More than a century ago Audubon initiated the first Christmas Bird Count. Twenty-two years ago Audubon established EagleWatch resulting in the return of the Southern Bald Eagle and creation of the model for current citizen science efforts. In recent years, Audubon has taken on Jay Watch, expanded coastal bird stewardship, and many other citizen science efforts.

Audubon jumpstarted citizen science in 1900 with 27 people taking part in the first-ever Christmas Bird Count, and even from the beginning, it was science combined with social change. Founder Frank Chapman envisioned the Christmas Bird Count as an alternative to the tradition-of-the-day, the Christmas “side hunt” in which participants travelled the countryside shooting birds simply for sport. While Chapman’s goal was collecting data, it was also looking to a desired future condition, one in which birds were valued more alive than dead.

Audubon has been built on this premise—that we can not only accomplish more good science and conservation by involving more participants, but that through this involvement, we all increase our knowledge of the science and conser-

vation issues, becoming more educated and emboldened when the need arises to advocate for birds and their habitat.

While single-day citizen science events remain alive and well—such as the Christmas Bird Count and Great Backyard Bird Count—we’ve grown these pursuits into longer standing projects, with a greater investment from volunteers and greater importance for their data.

Audubon Florida’s Eagle Watch celebrates its 22nd year in 2014, with volunteers monitoring the fate of eagle nests across the state.

Audubon’s Colony Watch involves volunteers in monitoring and protecting the wading bird rookeries of Central Florida in the proud tradition of Audubon’s rookery wardens.

Audubon’s partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission—the Florida Shorebird Alli-

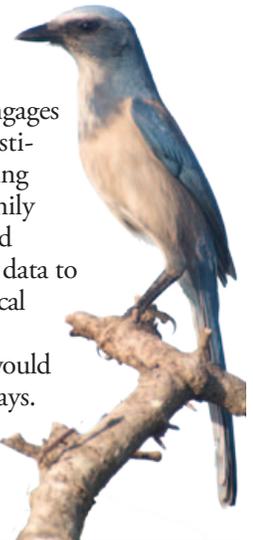
What exactly is citizen science?

“Citizen Science is the practice of public participation and collaboration in scientific research to increase scientific knowledge.”

--- National Geographic

ance—enlists volunteers to collect crucial data on coastal bird nesting efforts and success, and then to steward nesting colonies to improve their productivity.

Finally, Jay Watch, the newest citizen science program to Audubon, engages volunteers in the sophisticated survey and mapping of Florida Scrub-Jay family territories providing land managers with essential data to inform fire and mechanical treatment prescriptions without which habitat would become unsuitable for jays.



Florida Scrub-Jay



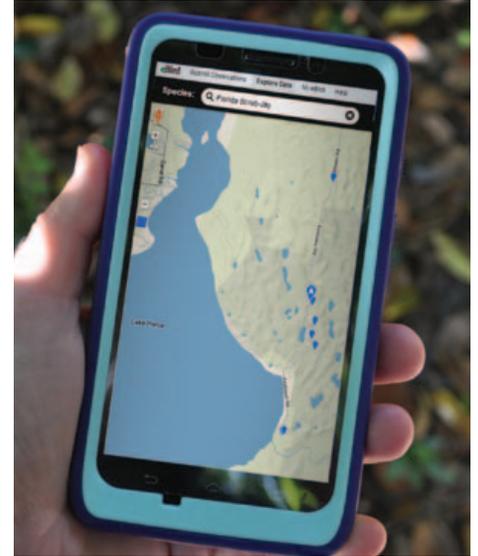
Jay Watch citizen scientists at Duette Preserve

Citizen Scientists of Today and Tomorrow

Citizen science is growing exponentially in Florida and technology is helping make that possible. Standardized field survey protocols for shorebirds and Florida Scrub-Jays are fine-tuned to scientific rigor in collaboration with academic advisors and agency partners. New and experienced computer-savvy citizen scientists enter survey data into eBird from their smartphones or into specially-designed databases through online portals that require “webinar” training for volunteers learning these 21st century skills. From EagleWatch nests to Corkscrew Swamp’s floodplain forest, from beach-nesting birds to wading bird rookeries, from Florida Scrub-

Jays to exotic snakes and lizards, today’s citizen scientists are not just collecting data but transforming it into electronic knowledge that helps protect birds both locally and globally.

Audubon Florida’s vision for the future of citizen science includes the doubling of citizen scientists throughout the state; technology has made data more robust and easy to interpret; results from citizen science efforts are well-documented and widely shared; the knowledge is creating better protection for birds; and younger and more diverse audiences are engaged.



Chapters Provide Valuable Citizen Science Work

By Jim Brady, Francis M. Weston Audubon

Just as the Christmas Bird Count has a long history with National Audubon, many Audubon chapters were founded on a long tradition of citizen science. In Pensacola, for example, Francis M. Weston (the chapter’s namesake) was a draftsman at Pensacola Naval Air Station who collected 53 years of bird occurrence data from 1916 until his death in 1969. In 1968, Bob and Lucy Duncan picked up Weston’s mantle, adding to regional knowledge of migration and avian distribution with records continuing today. The work of these birders resulted in two formal reports of birds in Northwest Florida, which are complemented by Breeding Bird Atlas surveys, Christmas Bird Counts, North American Migration Counts, and other regular surveys by local birders.

Like many chapters, Francis M. Weston Audubon (FMWAS) has since elaborated on these bird occurrence studies to conduct discreet citizen science projects on key sites and species. A longtime member on the Forest User’s Liaison Committee of Blackwater River State Forest (BRSF), FMWAS began a multi-year seasonal study of the birds of the 220,000-acre forest in 2010, to provide the Florida Forest Service data to help guide their resource management deci-

sions. The three-year study documented a total of 181 species, including 16 species of wintering sparrows in food plots planted for deer, turkey and quail, and the first nesting record of Southeastern American Kestrel in the area in 30 years. These data proved invaluable to efforts to defend the forest from proposed incompatible uses, and prompted the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to install kestrel boxes, four of which are now occupied!

These data were all collected by citizen scientists who painstakingly recorded their observations. Many Audubon chapters have likewise conducted, or are conducting, regular surveys of local birds. The Science Committee of the state board would like to know of your work, and is eager to provide technical assistance in designing studies and reporting your data.

For more information, contact Jim Brady, Science Committee Chairman at jbbrady@bellsouth.net or Jacqui Sulek, Chapters Coordinator, at jsulek@audubon.org.



Photo by Reinter Munguia

Southeastern American Kestrel

Legislative Update

Audubon Helps Lead Charge for new Water Laws and Money to Protect Springs and Coastal Estuaries and the Everglades

Will the 2014 Legislature Listen?

Florida's twin tragedies in 2013 were declining springs and devastated estuaries. Both are the result of years of bad water resources decisions. Florida has laws to protect both the natural flows of springs and rivers and to control pollution sources. But agencies and lawmakers have been slow to fund and enforce these programs.

Working with allies including the Florida Conservation Coalition led by former US Senator and Florida Governor Bob Graham and the increasingly effective Everglades Foundation, Audubon has advocated for a series of funding and policy decisions that should help springs, coastal waters and the Everglades.

As of this writing the Legislature seems poised to appropriate roughly \$160 million for Everglades and the Caloosahatchee and Indian River Lagoon estuaries. Those funds will help to build

projects to better manage and treat water before it is released into the natural environment. One of Audubon's top projects is money to finish the Kissimmee River Restoration, which will help Lake Okeechobee and reduce flushes of dirty water to the coasts. Other projects will help build treatment marshes and water storage reservoirs to better manage runoff from farm fields and urban ditches. Audubon is also working to help fund springs protection programs. The Governor recommended and the Legislature is likely to approve roughly \$50 million for springs' protection – mostly wastewater treatment projects.

Another funding priority is conservation lands. With the Florida Forever Coalition Audubon has been advocating for appropriations to buy and preserve habitat. One part of that funding may go to support the Rural and Family Lands program, which puts conservation easements on working ranches and forests.



Mary Jean Yon, Legislative Director

A push for major water policy this year seems to have faltered. Both pro-springs legislation and wetlands bills have run into trouble. As expected 2013 Audubon award recipient Senator Charlie Dean had used his committee chairmanship to stop the bad environmental bills and promote springs protection.

Audubon Keeps Conservation Lands from Being Sold

Audubon Florida and its members have made it clear that securing the most important conservation lands in Florida is the most precious gift that one generation can give to the next. For decades, leaders from across the state worked with government officials to acquire and protect these special places and critical habitats.

In May 2013, Audubon learned that just because an area is in public ownership, it does not mean all threats disappear. That was when the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) announced a controversial new plan to sell off or "surplus" some of these important conservation lands. Audubon and its members were quick to come to their defense, insisting that DEP review proposed land surplus decisions property by property in open

public meetings. In meeting after meeting, passionate advocates made it clear to state officials that many of the lands on their list were vital to our Florida's natural heritage and should not be sold. Charles Lee led the effort for Audubon Florida, rallying the public and supplying officials with detailed analysis on specific properties.

It didn't take long for DEP to begin the process of removing sites from their proposed surplus list. One by one the list began to shrink before nearly all of the most important sites had been removed. By the beginning of 2014, only a few key locations remained threatened by surplus sales. The state cancelled this initiative in early March 2014. Congratulations to everyone who spoke up on this important conservation issue.



Green Swamp. Photo by Charles Lee.

Chapters Collaborating for Conservation

Audubon chapters do many things. Sometimes they are watchdogs and other times visionaries. As watchdogs they can bring conservation concerns to light elevating them to statewide issues. Other times they take the lead, working with partners to turn vision into reality. In either case it is the passion, reach and willingness to collaborate that has created a powerful force for conservation.

Vote YES on number 1 is quickly becoming the mantra of Florida's Audu-

bon Chapters. Thanks to the vision and guidance of Executive Director Eric Draper, Audubon played a key role in gathering the petitions and raising funds for the Florida Water and Land Legacy Campaign to secure the Water and Land Legacy amendment a place on the 2014 ballot. While the Legacy team in Tallahassee builds their strategy for the next 6 months, Audubon Chapters started developing their own plan at the Academy in mid-April. Fortunately outreach and education are strong suits for Audu-

bon as that is what it is going to take to pass the amendment. With only a limited amount of time before the elections, many Chapters around the state will be forgoing the traditional summer shut down in order to take advantage of all opportunities to get the word out. The message, Vote Yes on Number 1!



The North Shore of Lake Apopka Audubon promotes a winning vision.

While one should not underestimate the incredible restoration efforts that have gone into the North Shore of Lake Apopka, there remains a vision to be fulfilled. The 20,000 acre north shore—once a toxic wasteland—now has a 360+ species bird list, more than any inland site in the entire U.S. and a Christmas Bird count of 174 species that ranks as the highest-ever inland total in North America; yet there is still work to be done.

Creating a National Wildlife Refuge, an ecotourism destination and an economic driver for Lake and Orange counties has become a priority for a growing number of individuals and organizations. Audubon's Charles Lee has been working closely with leaders from Orange Audubon and Oklawaha Valley Audubon to promote the value of building an economy based on this extraordinary wetland habitat. While members from Oklawaha Audubon have played a key role in developing the Wings and Wildlife Festival in Lake County, Orange Audubon leaders have complemented it with the Lake Apopka Wildlife Festival and Birdapalooza on the Orange County side.

“The key is to get people out there to see the north shore area,” shares AF Board member and chapter leader Bob Stamps. We need to provide access in order to continue to build support to

turn this place into a National Wildlife Refuge.” Having led many bus tours and field trips out to the north shore, Bob should know. “Once people get out there and see it, they are hooked. We just need to build the political will to make it happen.”

Audubon Chapters Defend Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge

When Audubon recently learned that a state agency called Space Florida wanted to build a rocket launch facility on top of one of the most ecologically important parts of Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, you can imagine the response: NOT ON OUR WATCH. Early Audubon leaders pushed to establish the refuge and we will defend their legacy.

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge is home to one of the most beautiful ecosystems on Florida's Atlantic coast. The Refuge is a globally recognized IBA (Important Bird Area), a key migratory stopover on the hemispheric Atlantic flyway, and destination for millions of out-of-state and international tourists. The state's ill-conceived plan to construct rocket launch facilities on natural habitat just miles from the underutilized NASA facilities makes no sense. The inconvenience to Florida's residents and visitors is great, but the proposal also affects the recovery of the threatened Florida Scrub-Jay, Florida's only endemic bird species. The US Fish and Wildlife Service recently invested

over \$2 million to restore fragile scrub habitat inside the refuge. The Service has stated that Space Florida's proposal may cause them to curtail their entire Scrub-Jay restoration effort – a step backwards that could doom this vital sub-population.

Audubon Florida's Director of Advocacy Charles Lee has campaigned vigorously to stop Space Florida's proposal. Central Florida chapters including Halifax River, Space Coast, Southeast Volusia, West Volusia, Oklawaha Valley, Kissimmee Valley, Seminole and Orange Audubon chapters rallied around the cause getting opponents out to attend and speaking at two public hearings. Over 500 people attended each night. The crowd's opposition to the plan was overwhelming. Though an environmental impact study is now underway and the challenge is far from over you can rest assured that Audubon is watching and ready to engage.



Photo by Reinier Munguia

Great Legacies of Florida Audubon Society



Garden Grove elementary students learn about the importance of insects as pollinators during their visit to the Street Audubon Nature Center in Winter Haven, Florida.

Among the great legacies of the Florida Audubon Society are the conservation gems preserved in its wildlife sanctuaries, and the three Nature Centers operated by Audubon Florida, and its chapters. The continuing generosity of Audubon members is required to manage and sustain these sites now, more than ever.

Audubon's Center for Birds of Prey is located on three acres on Lake Sybelia in Maitland, Florida. It houses the Raptor Clinic, visitor exhibits, and rehabilitation mews for injured eagles, hawks, and owls brought in for treatment from all over Florida. The Audubon Center for Birds of Prey is the premier rehabilitation and education facility of this type in the Eastern United States, and is visited by thousands every year.

In Winter Haven, the 40 acre Street Nature Center houses classrooms and exhibits and is the site of numerous nature trails, while owned by Florida Audubon Society, Inc., the day to day operations are managed by the Lake Region Audubon Society. A little further south in Polk County, the Babson Park nature center boasts five acres of classic Florida Scrub habitat, with nature centers and classrooms. This nature center is also owned by Florida Audubon, and is managed on a day to day basis by the local chapter, the Ridge Audubon Society.

Thousands of school children and adults take advantage of these facilities each year.

Around Florida the Florida Audubon Society owns and manages 80 wildlife sanctuary properties. Some of the most noteworthy conservation lands in Florida Audubon Society sanctuary system are:

- The Sabal Point Sanctuary on the Wekiva River in Seminole County. This 600 acre sanctuary contains outstanding examples of wetland swamp forest, and is noted for bears and other wildlife characteristic of the majestic Wekiva River.
- The Beulah Laidlaw Sanctuary in Washington County, nearly 300 acres of magnificent cypress swamp headwaters of Holmes Creek. Rich in wildlife, the sanctuary is managed by the Bay County Audubon Society chapter.
- The Ahhochee Hill Sanctuary north of Brooksville, Florida. This unique 270 acre property occupies an unusual hilly habitat in Florida. Largely forested, its open field is the site of highly successful bluebird nesting in nest boxes maintained by Hernando Audubon Society volunteers, and a resident caretaker.
- The St. Johns River Marsh Sanctuary in Brevard County. This 750 acre tract

of classic St. Johns River marsh includes islands with Sabal palms and hardwoods. Miles of winding St. Johns River run through this land.

- Bird Island and Orange Lake in Alachua County. Over 500 acres of Orange Lake, marsh and emergent islands. One of the first Audubon sanctuaries, patrolled by the famous Audubon wardens of the early 20th Century.

- Crocodile Lake on North Key Largo in Monroe County – over 120 acres of mangrove wetlands and shallow ponds adjacent to the Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

- The Miller Family Island in Pinellas County – only an acre in size, this lovely mangrove island in the midst of the urban St. Petersburg metropolitan area is home to a magnificent wading bird rookery. Managed by the Audubon Coastal Islands Sanctuaries office.

The ownership of land is both an advantage in conservation, and a responsibility that must be properly cared for. The upkeep of buildings, renovation and modernization to keep public places suitable for visitation, wildlife and land management are all activities that require the Florida Audubon Society to spend substantial amounts of money each year.

Over the years, all of our sanctuary and nature center lands and facilities have come about through the generosity of Audubon members. In addition to Sanctuary operations, Florida Audubon Society supports Audubon Florida's legislative staff in Tallahassee, as well as other executive staff costs. Often, the resources necessary have come to the Florida Audubon Society through donations, bequests, and trusts from people just like you.

To request a brochure on leaving a will or bequest to Florida Audubon Society, email Margaret Spontak at mbspontak@audubon.org or call (407) 644-0190, ext. 102.

48 Hours for Conservation

Audubon Florida launches an online 48 hour fundraising campaign starting on Tuesday, May 20 at 9 a.m. and ending at 9 p.m. on Wed., May 21. Funds generated through this intense grassroots fundraising drive support Audubon's important conservation work throughout Florida.

Take part in this exciting online campaign and receive special incentives. Donate \$100 or more and receive your choice of an Audubon print (while supplies last).

New Eagle Scout Gift to Center for Birds of Prey

Continuing a Great Legacy of Eagle Scout Projects



Christopher Bond next to the Atlantic Flyway Exhibit featuring raptor migration routes.

Audubon Florida's Center for Birds of Prey opened its newest education exhibit in March with the help of a local, dedicated Eagle Scout and his father. Christopher Bond, an Eagle Scout based out of the Orlando area, created an interactive Atlantic Flyway exhibit for the center with help from his father. The Bald Eagle, the Peregrine Falcon, the Swallow-tailed Kite, and the Osprey are represented on a flyway map, with each raptor's migratory patterns illuminated upon pushing its corresponding button. Truly a family effort, Christopher's older brother Andrew, who is now in college for computer science, helped his brother by doing graphic additions to the Atlantic Flyway map. Their father lent his electrical engineering expertise to the

For more details and to participate go to

www.GivetoAudubonFlorida.org



young men to install the LED lighting on the map. The whole exhibit took the Bond family approximately 96 hours to complete.

Christopher solicited donations from family, friends, and the community in order to complete the exhibit. During National Audubon's President and CEO David Yarnold's recent visit to Audubon Florida, he commented on the great exhibit, and how Christopher is an excellent example of a young man embracing Audubon's strategic focus of building future stewards. When asked by an Audubon staff member who inspired him for this project, Christopher replied with, "You did." The Center staff are excited that the exhibit can educate and inspire people about the flyways and birds of prey that migrate along them.

More than 50 projects have been completed at Audubon Center for Prey by Eagle Scouts as their contribution to the Central Florida community before their final review as Eagle Scout rank. These projects range from exhibits such as the Flyways exhibit to building nest boxes for screech owls. The Center has great respect for these young men, who are helping to benefit raptors and their habitats and supporting Audubon's mission.

To see Christopher's exhibit and other scout projects, visit the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland. The Center is open Tuesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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Full a full directory of staff and locations go to
<http://fl.audubon.org/audubon-locations>



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Save the Date

Audubon FLORIDA Assembly 2014

October 17 and 18, 2014
Hutchinson Island Marriott
Stuart, Florida

Mark your calendar now for the Audubon Assembly 2014. Watch for registration details on fl.audubon.org to be posted in May.

Hutchinson Island, at the intersection of the Atlantic Ocean and the Indian River Estuary, has 21 miles of beautiful beaches and unique marine and inland habitats providing home to more than 2,200 marine and wildlife species. The host hotel, a certified green lodging facility, overlooks the Intercostal Waterway. The area provides the perfect setting for this Assembly which focuses on the importance of renewing Florida's commitment to water and land conservation.



Bath Tub Beach is one of many great birding spots near the hotel. Photo by Kim Seng