



Audubon FLORIDA

Naturalist

SUMMER 2012

Conserve Water to
Sustain Life

2012 Florida Audubon Society Leadership

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Photo by Scott Taylor



*John Elting, Chairman,
Florida Audubon Society*

John Elting tours SJRWMD's Lake Apopka restoration during a recent Florida Audubon Society Board Meeting

A View from the Swamp

Nature is chaos. And we as scientists and naturalists do our best to make some kind of sense of it all. We are forever establishing baselines for the study of flora and fauna. Testing and measuring, recording and interpreting. The southern half of our state, in particular the Greater Everglades, including Big Cypress, Fakahatchee, the Panther Refuge, Picayune State Forest, Collier-Seminole State Park, and the Okaloacoochee Slough, have been experiencing water deprivation for some five years. At present we are in the midst of the worst drought in 80 years. Some of this is most certainly attributable to climate change, and some to manipulation of water source and channel. Regardless, water quality and quantity has a vast effect on the well-being of all living things.

As a naturalist, I have observed the decline of some of our native terrestrial orchids and the hand fern. Some of this may be attributed to factors surrounding photosynthesis, which of course relies critically on water. Further, the lack of water may have some effect upon the fungi on which most of our plants rely for sustenance and, in some cases, seed germination. The latter is important in that fungi are normally resistant to the effects of drought which might point up its present severity. In summation, drought has certainly brought stress to some of our orchids and bromeliads which are already both rare and endangered.

We at Audubon Florida have made water quantity and quality a priority. Our work with Wood Storks, which rely almost entirely on the local water level for effective foraging and nesting, is an example. We have worked tirelessly for years and continue to do so for Everglades water quality standards and enforcement as well as for storage and treatment. To "get fresh water into the parched Everglades" is our mantra.

As we planned this year's Audubon Assembly, we decided to showcase the significance of water conservation for the Everglades, coastal habitats and other places that make Florida special. Our staff, board members, and volunteers are excellent stewards and advocates and can provide the leadership needed to address this important conservation issue. I hope you will join us at the Audubon Assembly in October to learn more about how you can help.

Thanks for your support during the past fiscal year. Together we are making a difference.

Sincerely,
John W. Elting, Chairman

Cover photo by
Jim Urbach
www.jimurbach.smugmug.com/

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Thank You

Audubon Florida and Florida Audubon Society Chapter Donors for FY12

You make our conservation work possible through your contributions and local conservation leadership.

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Note: A special thanks goes to Collier County Audubon who provides major support to Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary's education program and to Audubon's policy work in Southwest Florida.

Water Leadership for Florida

I had the fortune to come of age in the era when Florida was debating and establishing the water laws we live with today. Legendary state leaders such as Governor Ruben Askew, Representative Richard Pettigrew and Senator Phil Lewis crafted a statewide system of water management funded by local taxes and controlled by citizen boards. That system worked for years to preserve wetlands, floodplains and groundwater recharge, to limit water use and to bring science to the question of how to keep Florida's springs and rivers flowing and water in our lakes and swamps.

Local and state Audubon leaders played an important role then. In my hometown Tampa it was not unusual to hear the message that water is critical for wildlife, as much as for people. That message helped anchor in Florida laws the idea that we manage water not just for water supply but as resource to be balanced between human and environmental needs. The fundamental issue was that Florida's water is a public resource to be managed for the benefit of all.

The remarkable history of Florida water leadership is now being undone by a generation of politicians who seem to think that water policy can be conveniently changed to suit an ideology of lower taxes and less regulation.

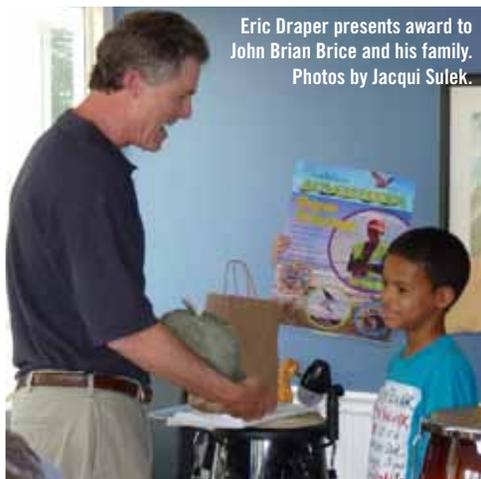
Audubon and its allies wage an annual battle in Tallahassee to defend state water laws while at the local level citizens fight to keep water in their lakes and springs. Nevertheless hundreds of scientists and resource managers have been fired from water agencies, and citizens are pushed aside from key water resource decisions.

From Askew, Pettigrew and Lewis I learned the ethics of water leadership. And I learned the ethics of personal responsibility from an earlier generation of Audubon community leaders. Those lessons are brought to light in author Cynthia Barnett's proposed "Water Ethic," which shapes the theme of this year's Audubon Assembly. The Assembly is held this year in Sarasota, a community that leads the way in water conservation. Please join us on October 26 and 27. Be a leader for Florida's water.



A handwritten signature in black ink.

Eric Draper
Executive Director, Audubon Florida
President, Florida Audubon Society



Eric Draper presents award to John Brian Brice and his family.
Photos by Jacqui Sulek.



Young Leader Recognized

At the Birding and Blues Brunch following the Northeast Florida Bird-a-thon, Audubon honors John Brian Brice, one of our youngest Florida Bird Stewards. John Brice is nine years old and has been stewarding Least Tern and Wilson's Plover nesting on Fort Matanzas National Monument beach for five years. John Brice and another young steward from St. Petersburg, Nora Jade Flower, will be featured in Audubon Adventures, an educational kit for 3rd-5th graders developed each year by National Audubon.

To order kits and donate them to 3rd-5th grade classes in your region, go to <http://education.audubon.org/audubon-adventures-grades-3-5>

Rethinking Florida Water Policy

Photo by George Willson

It's time to rethink Florida water policy and call on the Legislature to put some power in the laws that are supposed to protect Florida's water resources. Over the past three decades no major user of water has run out. No user, that is, except for the environment. Many lakes and streams have gone dry. And some homeowners with small shallow wells have run out of water when big users take too much. Water managers are in the habit of blaming drought. The drought excuse is greeted with skepticism by many people who use Florida's lakes, rivers, springs and other waterways. But citizens are even more baffled by decisions to grant new water use permits when there is simply not enough water left in the natural system.

Audubon is calling on its members and allied conservation organizations to advocate for changes to water policy that will truly pre-

vent harm to Florida's water resources. This call to action runs against the current of recent changes to Florida's water laws. Over the past few years, flying under the false flag of tax and regulatory reform, our laws have been rolled back. Changes include limiting citizen notice and participation in permitting decisions, cutting back on agency science, wholesale firing of water resource experts and proposals to sell off water management lands that help recharge aquifers and protect floodplains.

Audubon proposes five changes that will greatly improve management of Florida's water resources:

1. Restore Citizen Participation – Major water use permitting decisions should be more open to the public. Citizens can help ensure applicants meet a standard that their withdrawals will not harm the natural system.

2. Science and Resource Management – Water management districts should again budget funds to study aquifers and other water resources. Good science, not applicants' demands, should drive every water resource decision. Applicants should mitigate for impacts and actually improve the water source in exchange for a permit to withdraw water.

3. Funding - The Legislature and Governor Scott should reverse the ruinous policy of cutting water management budgets. Budgets should be restored to allow for good science and land and water resource management.

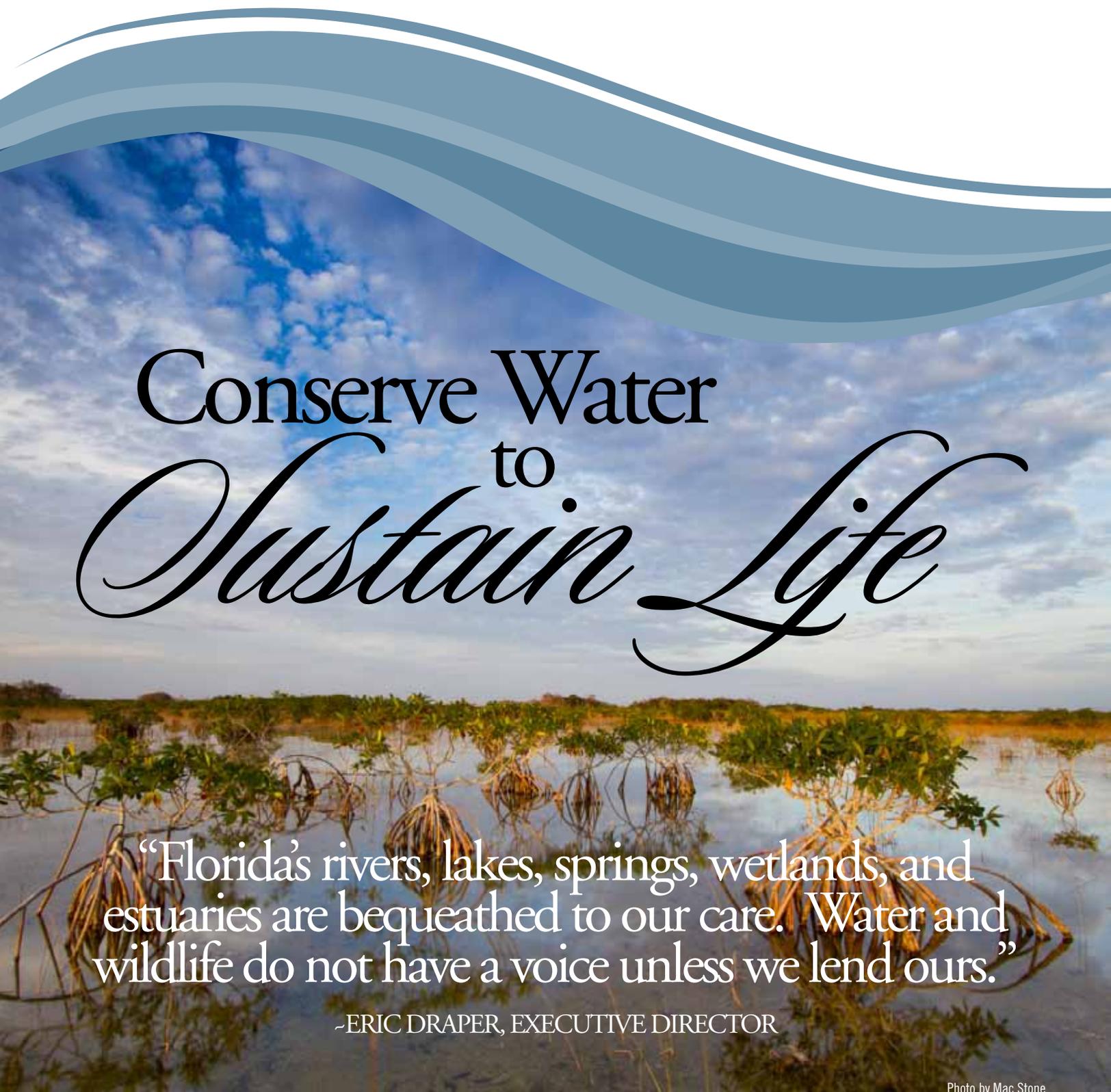
4. Mandatory Conservation – Water management districts must be given the power to require water users to conserve water as a condition of permits. Utilities, many local governments and agriculture have long resisted this approach. Water is a public resource and every permit should show serious commitment to conserve it.

5. Natural Storage – Smart water storage makes use of Florida's environment to replenish aquifers and keep water in swamps and floodplains. Much of Florida is now over-drained as a result of poorly planned flood control practices. Water management districts should be funded and required to work with private landowners and public land managers to plug ditches and allow water to seep back into the ground and wetlands where it will help augment water supplies.

Audubon asks its members, chapters and allies to join in persuading legislators to improve Florida's water laws. For more information, go to audubonoffloridanews.org and click on Water Issues.



Photo by John Johnson



Conserve Water to *Sustain Life*

“Florida’s rivers, lakes, springs, wetlands, and estuaries are bequeathed to our care. Water and wildlife do not have a voice unless we lend ours.”

-ERIC DRAPER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Photo by Mac Stone

Water conservation is inextricably linked to Audubon Florida’s three statewide conservation priorities adopted at last year’s Audubon Assembly – Everglades restoration, coastal conservation, and Florida’s Special Places. Join us at the 2012 Audubon Assembly to learn and share how Florida can manage precious water resources so that wildlife and people can flourish. The following articles set the stage for the learning sessions and robust discussions incorporated into this year’s annual gathering in Sarasota.

This section funded with support from Plum Creek Foundation.



On June 23 more than a thousand people rallied at Silver River State Park to save Silver Springs from the threat posed by a proposal to pump massive amounts of water from the aquifer feeding Florida's original tourist attraction.

Water for Florida's Special Places: It's simply drying up.

Photo by Lucy Tobias

BY CHARLES LEE, DIRECTOR OF ADVOCACY

Last month more than a thousand people rallied to save Silver Springs from the threat posed by a proposal to pump massive amounts of water from the aquifer feeding Florida's original tourist attraction. What is it about this famous place that strikes a chord in so many people's hearts?

Through Audubon's campaign to Protect the Places that make Florida Special, we have learned that most Floridians have a special place - a park or water body that took their breath away or provided an unforgettable experience.

We have asked people to share their experiences through Audubon Florida's news site and Facebook page. What amazes me is how many people write about springs, rivers, lakes, swamps, creeks and bays.

In fact, the Special Places campaign was launched at Big Blue in Washington County. Big Blue is a huge gin clear lake surrounded by sugar sand dunes fifty miles north of Panama City. Audubon worked with local residents and landowners to stop a proposed well-field that would take up to 30 million gallons a day from the aquifer feeding the lake.

In protecting Florida's Special Places, we ask people to Take Five:

- Take yourself to a special place
- Take a friend or family

- Take pictures and notes
- Take a moment to share the experience with others
- Take action to protect the places that make Florida special.

That is just what the people rallying for Silver Springs were doing - taking action to protect a remarkable resource.

Someone once compared Florida's springs to the Grand Canyon. There is nothing like them in the world, these links to vast underground caverns discharging astounding amounts of fresh water. It only takes a visit to be charmed and captured by their unique beauty.

Flows at Silver Springs are already reduced to a third of historic measurements. This happened while state water managers failed to set "minimum flows and levels" for the spring, something the Legislature instructed them to do 40 years ago, in 1972. So people are worried, and for good reason.

Almost every Florida water feature, all those places people find so special, have less water. Rivers such as the Withlacoochee, Suwannee, Hillsborough and Caloosahatchee have lost flow. Lakes in some parts of Florida have completely dried up.

Some water loss results from droughts. But there is more to the picture. The laws that pro-

tect Florida's water resources are being ignored in favor of water users. From the flagrantly wasteful flooding of sugarcane fields, massive irrigation proposed near Silver Springs, thousands of square miles of green lawns, and ditches and canals that carry off rainwater before it can soak into the ground, Florida's water is not well managed. This is ironic since our state once had the nation's best water laws.

Florida's water managers have known all along about the regional decline in rainfall. Permissible limits on aquifer water withdrawal could have been adjusted to respond to less rainfall. But just like the neglected process of setting "minimum flows and levels," water managers did nothing - they just kept continuing to issue permits for more wells to take water from the dwindling aquifer.

Audubon will continue to urge people to use the places that make Florida special. We believe that people make the connection between swimming, fishing, canoeing or just seeing a Florida spring and the need for conservation. Floridians and their political leaders must turn their attention to real solutions. It is time to closely evaluate existing and potential consumptive permits and to link permits with strong, enforceable water and permanent conservation requirements on all water users. Absent such bold action, the Special Places in Florida that depend on water to sustain their life will soon all be gone.



Photo by Mac Stone

Water for the Everglades: It's all connected.

BY JULIE HILL-GABRIEL, DIRECTOR OF EVERGLADES POLICY

Water is the resource that connects and defines the greater Everglades Ecosystem, which is as vast as it is unique. When working to protect and restore a watershed larger than some states, implementing Audubon Florida's signature ecosystem-wide approach is very challenging. Restoring freshwater flows to sustain life in the Everglades is the target upon which Audubon friends and advocates must remain focused if we are to see the return of spectacular wading bird super colonies that define a healthy Everglades.

The Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP), championed by the late Dr. John Ogden during his time as Audubon Florida's Director of Bird Conservation, is reforming and refocusing Everglades restoration planning in ways that seemed unimaginable only a few short years ago. By combining and planning components of different projects together, CEPP will implement complimentary projects on a shorter time frame to achieve benefits to the central part of the ecosystem where restoration progress has previously lagged.

Changes in habitat as a result of nutrient pollution occur primarily as a result of the application of phosphorus to farms both north and south of Lake Okeechobee. When water flowing off of these farms is laden with phosphorus, and that water flows to more pristine areas, the unique, nutrient-poor habitat relied upon by native wildlife is degraded. The recent agreement between the State of Florida and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to build \$880 million worth of water treatment projects will filter

these nutrients before the water reaches and alters natural areas.

Lake Okeechobee, as the liquid heart of the Everglades and its tributary, affects almost all other parts of the ecosystem. When the Lake is too high, water is released through the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries to avoid drowning the Lake's vegetation, and to protect the aging Herbert Hoover Dike. When Lake levels drop, habitats for the Everglade Snail Kite dries up and there is not enough water to support the health of the coastal estuaries and southern Everglades. Managing Lake Okeechobee is therefore essential for the entire ecosystem.

Audubon scientists at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary study the habitat of the largest his-

toric Wood Stork rookery and other habitat in the vast Big Cypress region. What they have discovered in the Western Everglades is that when the water is gone, so are the birds.

We cannot change the fact that wildlife and people need water to survive. What can change is the balance between water used by utilities, agriculture and homeowners and water that remains in the natural system. With support from South Florida's citizens and businesses for a water ethic that benefits a healthy Everglades, long term benefits for the expansive Greater Everglades Ecosystem can be realized. To get there, Audubon's Everglades advocacy will continue to put a premium on water conservation and smart water management.

Cooper City Awarded Audubon Florida's 2012 Excellence in Water Conservation Award



Everglades Policy Associate Jane Graham presents Cooper City with their well-earned award

This spring, Cooper City received the first ever Audubon Florida Excellence in Water Conservation Award. Cooper City's outstanding water conservation program "You Win-We all Win" illustrates how the simple act of saving water can be the most environmentally friendly and least expensive way to protect our treasured water resources. A few years ago, Cooper City faced the prospect of having to spend \$12 million on a new water treatment plant or asking the South Florida Water Management District for an additional allocation of water. Instead, Cooper City developed its innovative water conservation program that asked residents to save just 5 percent of total water use by 2013. A resounding success, the city's water savings almost doubled before the 2013 goal, without having to spend millions of dollars or increase their water allocation.



Photo by Greg Stephens

Water for Florida's Coastal Habitats: The importance of estuaries

BY JULIE WRAITHMELL, DIRECTOR OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

When freshwater finally ends its winding journey to the sea, its work has only just begun: these vital mixing zones of fresh and salt water form the basis of vibrant estuarine communities. Audubon needs only to look to the birds for confirmation of the importance of estuaries; the prey base they support and the habitat they provide in the form of seagrass meadows, mudflats, mangrove forests and salt marshes make them magnets for Florida's birdlife.

Look at the vibrant rookeries of White Ibis, Reddish Egrets, Roseate Spoonbills, Brown Pelicans and more, supported by the estuarine engine of Tampa Bay. Or the dogged reliance of shorebirds and seabirds on the inlets of Florida's Atlantic Coast—not only does the mixing of salt and freshwater result in abundant prey, but the constant flux of erosion and accretion creates the mudflats and early successional beach habitats these species rely upon. The estuarine bays of the Panhandle are renowned for their wintering rafts of waterfowl, such as scaup, Redheads and loons. Even songbird migrants rely on this nexus: making landfall after long overwater migrations, Neotropical migrants refuel in coastal habitats and then follow our rivers like migration superhighways as they wing their way north to their breeding grounds.

Part of managing and restoring coastal systems is getting the water right, ensuring that enough water of sufficient quality and quantity reaches our coastal systems at the right times of year.

As communities look to increased river surface water withdrawals connected to vital estuaries to feed Florida's and upstream states' ever-growing populations, the importance of maintaining the delicate estuarine balance of fresh and salt water flows through proper water management and conservation becomes increasingly important. At times of great variation, with drought

followed by deluge, birds provide an especially important and consistent indicator of the health of our estuaries. Birds can sound the alarm when the coastal wetlands, the primary habitat for 75% of America's commercial fish and shellfish, are at risk. And when there are great flocks of waterbirds in nesting colonies, nature is saying the water is just about right.

Helping Manage Tampa Bay's Estuaries

Photo by Tammy Lyons



Ann Paul and Mark Rachal

The large estuaries centered around Tampa Bay support more than 90,000 pairs of the state's nesting waterbirds, with large, raucous colonies of Brown Pelicans, herons, egrets, spoonbills and more setting up shop on the region's myriad mangrove islands and cypress domes. Accordingly, it comes as no surprise that Audubon has played a leadership role in management of these resources for more than 75 years. What began historically as wardening and protection of breeding birds from hunters has now evolved into a robust stewardship program monitoring and managing these populations, while using them as a barometer for estuary health.

Today, the sanctuary office is helmed by Ann Paul, a National Audubon employee for 21 years, and Mark Rachal, a six-year veteran of this signature Audubon program. They are well known among the region's natural resource managers for their firsthand knowledge of species abundance and distribution, as well as the management needs of these vulnerable birds. Ann and Mark are equally comfortable in the brutal Florida sun toting oyster shells to build a breakwater reef as they are intervening with trespassers on Audubon's sanctuaries or presenting analysis of Audubon science in testimony before decision-makers.

Audubon is fortunate to have such dedicated staff who in partnership with chapters and volunteer citizen scientists will write the next part of Audubon's history in this important region.



In Pursuit of a Florida Water Ethic

Interview with Cynthia Barnett

Cynthia Barnett, author of *Blue Revolution and Mirage*, is the keynote speaker for the Audubon Assembly awards banquet. Margaret Spontak, Audubon Florida's Development Director, had the opportunity to interview Cynthia about her books, upcoming Assembly presentation and hopes for Florida's water future.

What inspired you to write your two water books?

As a newspaper and then Florida Trend reporter, I had the opportunity to write about big picture water and environmental issues such as mitigation banking, the Everglades and the Florida Council of 100. After going back to graduate school to complete a Master's in American history with a specialization in environmental history, I decided to work full-time as a water journalist. I never intended to write two water books. *Mirage* came out in spring of 2007. It led me into *Blue Revolution*. Attendees at a talk about *Mirage* in Cedar Key convinced me that I needed to write a book that was solutions-oriented.

What do you hope attendees will take away from your presentation in October?

I hope that Audubon volunteer leaders take the idea of a "water ethic" and spread it throughout Florida. Florida's legal, policy and water management systems cannot drive the needed changes. Apalachicola Bay's water issues were in court for 20 years without resolution. Change will require a shared conservation ethic among everyone.

How does Florida compare to the rest of the nation on water conservation?

Florida is behind Georgia in water conservation. In 2010 Georgia passed one of the most progressive water conservation laws in the southeast. In 1972 Florida passed excellent land and water laws. Florida's lagging economy

has held back the execution of those laws for four decades.

What is the most important role Audubon members can play in addressing Florida's water issues?

a) Elect candidates with the courage and independence to implement water laws. Make our elected officials accountable for implementing sound water laws and policies. b) Engage more people in water issues. It is a very insular system with the water management districts very disconnected from the community and the public. c) Spread the water ethic to churches, neighborhoods and communities.

What do you mean by creating a "water ethic"?

I was inspired about the concept of a "water ethic" from Aldo Leopold's *Sand County Almanac*. Leopold offered tangible actions that people could take to create a land ethic. A water ethic begins with water for the environment, leaving as much water as prudently possible for nature. History tells us that we must keep as much water as we can in the natural systems.

You talk about Sarasota as a model in your book *Blue Revolution*. What lessons can the rest of the state learn from Sarasota, our host community for the Assembly?

Sarasota is living proof that a water ethic can happen in Florida. Other communities passed water conservation rules during the drought and then repealed them afterwards. Sarasota thinks ahead and uses the long view. They are thinking about the entire watershed and are thinking 50 years into the future.

Are you hopeful for Florida's environmental future?

I could give you 100 reasons why I am optimistic. Littering is the best example. We have

changed environmental behavior to create a community-wide ethic against littering. Other examples include reduction of smoking and avoidance of overexposure to the sun. These things are totally taboo now. Sometimes we get cynical, but we are better stewards today than we were in the past.

In addition to your two books, what can Audubon members read to become better advocates for a water ethic and prepare for the Audubon Assembly?

Two historic books include the *Sand County Almanac* and *Land Into Water, Water Into Land*. Another academic book is Tom Swihart's book, *Florida's Water*.

Cynthia Barnett
Author, *Blue Revolution: Unmaking America's Water Crisis*
(Beacon Press 2011)

Cynthia Barnett is a long-time journalist who has reported on freshwater issues from the Suwannee River to Singapore. She is the author of Blue Revolution: Unmaking America's Water Crisis, which calls for a water ethic for America. Blue Revolution was named by the Boston Globe as one of the top 10 science books of 2011. Ms. Barnett's previous book, Mirage: Florida and the Vanishing Water of the Eastern U.S., won the gold medal for best nonfiction in the Florida Book Awards and was named by The St. Petersburg Times as one of the top 10 books that every Floridian should read. Ms. Barnett worked for newspapers and magazines for 25 years, including a 14 year stint as a senior writer at Florida Trend. She now focuses full-time on books. For more information, please visit the author's website at www.cynthiabarnett.net.



Conserve Water to

2012 Audubon Assembly

October 26 and 27 • Hyatt Regency, Sarasota, Florida



Photos by Jim Urbach



Join us at the 2012 Audubon Assembly in Sarasota—a pioneering city in sustainability and water conservation—to celebrate the beauty of Florida’s waters and our role in conserving water and implementing sound and protective policies so that life continues to abound in Florida’s Special Places.

Sustain Life

Register Now

Register online by October 5 at <http://fl.audubon.org> to reserve the all-inclusive \$135 early bird price. This package includes all Friday and Saturday programs: field trips, Friday luncheon, learning sessions, cocktail reception (cash bar) and awards banquet, Saturday lunch, conservation priority session and workshops.

Please consider migrating to the Assembly in flocks by sharing transportation in order to reduce global warming pollution.

Early Bird all-inclusive ticket: \$135 (on or before October 5)

Regular and at-the-door all inclusive ticket: \$150 (after October 6)

Friday Only: \$100 (Field Trips, Opening luncheon, Learning Sessions—does not include banquet)

Friday Evening: \$75 (reception and awards banquet)

To register by mail, contact Jonathan Webber at 850-222-2473 or jwebber@audubon.org. Make your room reservation at the Hyatt Regency Sarasota, a designated green lodging facility, **by September 25** online at <https://resweb.passkey.com/go/Flaudubon> or call 1-888-421-1442 and mention Florida Audubon Society to receive the special \$119 rate.

Friday Learning Sessions

Take a moment to imagine Florida and its unique ecosystems without the freshwater critical to their survival. Located along the Atlantic flyway, Florida water resources support not only resident birds, but migratory species as well. Friday learning sessions will delve into water issues across the state as scientists, conservation leaders, and policy experts examine case studies to help you learn how water might be better protected in your area.

Water for our Coasts

When freshwater meets salt, ecological magic happens, and Audubon needs only to look to the birds for confirmation of the importance of these special estuaries. Part of managing and restoring coastal systems is getting the water right, ensuring that enough water of sufficient quality reaches our coastal systems at the right times of year. Join us for a discussion of the importance of Florida estuaries and ensuring sufficient water for our coasts and coastal wildlife.

Water for the Everglades

As Everglades restoration projects and plans progress, the decisions regarding where, when and how clean freshwater is delivered will determine success. Learn from an Audubon scientist the needs of Everglades birds, gain the perspective of a water management public official, and discover how you can actively advocate to protect our water resources and the role of water conservation to sustain life in the Everglades.

Water for Florida's Special Places

Whether it's Silver Springs, Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary or your favorite state park, there is nothing more prized than Florida's Special Places. Are current efforts to manage and protect water for these areas working? What are the consequences if we fail? Learn about what is happening now in terms of regulatory actions and reactions and how you can participate.

Audubon's 2013 Conservation Priorities

The formal adoption of Audubon's 2013 conservation priorities occurs Saturday morning. Resolutions and accomplishments from the six regional conservation committees will be presented and then formally recommended for approval by Audubon's Board of Directors at the October 27 annual meeting. Don't miss your chance to weigh in on our goals for the upcoming year.

Field Trips

Guided by Sarasota, Venice Area and Manatee County Audubon Chapters, Friday and Saturday morning excursions will traverse unique habitats supporting a wide range of bird species. Destinations include Myakka River State Park, the Celery Fields, and South Lido Beach. Sign-up for field trips on-site at the Assembly registration table; visit <http://fl.audubon.org> for a list of field trip times and destinations.

Conservation Leadership Initiative

Introduced as a new program at the 2011 Assembly, the Conservation Leadership Initiative (CLI) is back by popular demand. College students interested in environmental leadership are matched with Audubon mentors to share and collaborate on ideas to better reach and connect with the next generation of conservationists. CLI includes facilitated walking workshops at nearby locations and networking opportunities for college students to meet the largest and most talented group of conservation staff and volunteers in the state.

Participation in CLI requires advance registration and a commitment to mentoring and engaging a participating college student. Contact (305) 371-6399 ext. 140 or email flconservation@audubon.org, if interested in participating in this exciting event.

Celebrate Audubon Chapters

The Saturday Chapter Awards Luncheon recognizes significant chapter achievements and milestones, while exhibits on display throughout Assembly showcase inspiring chapter efforts and projects.

Know a chapter deserving of an award? Nominate your own or another chapter for the following categories: Chapter of the Year, Best Conservation Project, Best Education Project, and Best Membership Recruitment program.

Nominations and supporting materials must be received by Sept. 30th for consideration. For additional questions or to submit nominations, contact Jacqui Sulek, Chapter Conservation Manager, at jsulek@audubon.org or (386) 497-4185.

Join us at the Oasis: Movie Screening and Cocktails

For attendees arriving Thursday evening, enjoy a special screening of the new documentary, *Last Call at the Oasis*. This 2012 film examines global water supply and identifies water as the most serious and pressing issue of this century.



Celebrating Florida's Special Waters Reception & Banquet

As the Friday reception kicks off, keynote speaker Cynthia Barnett will be on hand to mingle and sign books during the cash bar social hour focused on Florida's beautiful and special waters. The following awards banquet will feature Ms. Barnett's thought-provoking and inspiring keynote address, *Blue Revolution: A Water Ethic for Florida and America*, as well as recognizing state-wide conservation leaders.

Volunteers

in Action



Second graders from Englewood Elementary visit the Venice Rookery with teacher Alana Capek.
Photo by Richard Holder

The 2012 Audubon Assembly offers the opportunity to get to know the three amazing Audubon chapters within the Sarasota area. All will share their local knowledge and lead field trips departing from the Hyatt Regency Sarasota. Although they share similar missions, Sarasota Audubon, Venice Area Audubon and Manatee County Audubon have unique elements that define them.

Sarasota Audubon
<http://www.sarasotaaudubon.org/>

Mission: Sarasota Audubon Society is a local chapter of the National Audubon Society, dedicated to the protection, conservation and enjoyment of birds, wildlife and the environment here in sunny Sarasota, Florida.

Sarasota Audubon's signature conservation project is the Beach Nesting Bird Program

where volunteers monitor Snowy Plovers, Least Terns and Black Skimmers as they struggle to survive on our busy beaches. Twenty to thirty members have participated over the years along with local partners including turtle watch volunteers.

Also clearly identifying Sarasota is their connection with the Celery Fields. Working closely with Sarasota County the chapter surveyed and monitored birds during the development of a project converting prior agricultural fields to a storm water treatment area, and were consulted on an 80 acre wetland restoration plan. This year they launched their Gift of Nature Campaign to raise \$1.36 million dollars for a nature center at the Celery Fields. Once built, they will be able to expand their education programs and assist Sarasota County in maintaining the Fields as prime birding habitat. To date they have raised \$500,000. Congratula-

tions to Sarasota Audubon for taking on such a bold project.

Venice Area Audubon
<http://www.veniceaudubon.org/>

Mission: Promoting interest in wildlife and fostering the cause of conservation with emphasis on birds and their habitat.

The identifying features of Venice Area Audubon are their highly praised education program and the Venice Rookery. It is no surprise their two passions are closely connected. Since 2002 Venice Area Audubon has leased a building from Sarasota County to use as their welcome and education center. Volunteers work throughout the year on an educational butterfly garden and the seemingly endless task of replacing Brazilian Pepper and other invasive exotics with Florida native plants.

Sarasota President Jeanne Dubi and friends on expedition in the Galapagos Islands.

Photos courtesy of Mike Dubi.



Photo by Billie Knight

Several hundred yards away lies the Venice Rookery, claimed to be one of the area's best kept secrets. A tiny island in the middle of a small lake provides necessary protection for nesting Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, Anhingas and Night Herons. The unobstructed and close range views provide a photographer's dream setting and attract nature lovers from great distances, especially during nesting season, January through March. Last year over sixty-five second graders from Englewood Elementary with teacher Alana Capek visited the Venice Rookery to see nesting birds and their habitat.

Using the Rookery as a classroom makes Venice Area Audubon's education program extremely popular. Students and volunteers are provided binoculars and the program reaches more than 2,000 local elementary school students annually, heightening their awareness of birds and nature. The decision to hire a profes-

sional educator to run the program has assured its quality and consistency. Keeping teacher Alana on board has become their number one fundraising priority!

Manatee County Audubon <http://www.manateeaudubon.org/>

Mission: The purpose of this organization shall be to protect, preserve, restore and enjoy the natural environment by creating an awareness and appreciation of birds, other wildlife, and our native habitat through our nature preserve, field trips and providing educational opportunities in Manatee county and its surrounding areas.

For the last 10 years the 30-acre Felts Preserve has defined Manatee County Audubon. It is a special place that educates and inspires. One hundred fifty species of birds

and 33 species of butterflies have been documented. The area has even been certified as a Monarch way station, supplying nectar for migrating butterflies.

"Actually, Felts Preserve is what got us so interested in birding and into several Audubon Clubs. We saw an article on Felts and since we live nearby in Palmetto, went to check it out, joined Manatee Audubon, took their Bird Identification Class, attended field trips and we are hooked," shared photographer Billie Knight.

For the past three years Felts has also provided the foundation for the Junior Audubon program. Kids between 5 and 12 years of age have learned about bugs, plants, butterflies, snakes, and natural history on the Preserve.

The kids learn quickly and now often leave "campus" to study eagles, turtles, the beach and other habitats, challenging their educators to do more exploring themselves. Manatee County Audubon conservation efforts are not limited to the Preserve, however. Over the past several years they have also become bird stewards by educating beachgoers on Anna Maria Island. Once again, turtle watchers and bird stewards have become great partners.

Chapter Joint Travels

While Sarasota, Venice Area and Manatee County may focus on their particular projects, they also unite for unique fun together. Although each chapter has an extensive schedule of field trips and outings during the year, they have discovered the value in offering a cooperative trip to more exotic locations. By drawing on a larger audience they fill trips to capacity, raise money for their respective projects and most importantly, create special bonds with one another. This winter they hosted three full trips to the Galapagos and raised close to \$20,000 doing what Audubon members love to do - connecting with nature!



Photo by Billie Knight

Leaving a

Legacy

By Connecting Children with Nature



Audubon Center for Birds of Prey Volunteer Robert Veal shares one of the Center's ambassador birds with Kano and Kinilani Magpuri. Photo by Susan Warren.



Deb Carrier, Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary supporter.



5th grade student participating in Wild Florida Adventure program.



Mrs. Avavena's 2nd Grade Class

In Richard Louv's book, *Last Child in the Woods*, the author speaks about the importance of connecting children with nature. Louv believes that, "Children need nature for the healthy development of their senses, and, therefore, for learning and creativity."

At Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland and Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary near Naples, educators are doing just that. Through on and off site education programs, collectively the two centers serve thousands of youth annually. In addition to contributing to the healthy growth of children, the centers develop an understanding of the importance of conservation and environmental sustainability.

Deb Carrier, one of Corkscrew Sanctuary's newest education program supporters, shared her feelings about the center and its education program: "As a naturalist and photographer, Corkscrew Sanctuary's pristine beauty and

zen-like peacefulness never ceases to renew and amaze me. Sharing this unique nature experience, through the successful education program, resonates with my personal mission to support children through educational and environmental minds and hearts to the wonders of the natural world. They learn about the ecosystem web and understand their important responsibility as junior environmental stewards."

"I was lucky to grow up close to nature with birds and wildlife as my friends. The best way to describe my childhood nature experience is to quote from a student's journal entry after their field trip. They wrote – I get a happy and free feeling that make me feel good inside and love life. When I visit Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary I feel like a kid again!"

Spending three days in the Everglades as part of an Earth Day Celebration, Deb was inspired to broaden her horizons on the River of Grass and to become a more active steward.

After reading a piece on the Everglades in an Audubon magazine, she decided to explore how she could support Everglades education efforts. This led to Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary's education program managed by Rebecca Beck.

Scott Taylor, one of Audubon Florida's newest board members, has been supporting Audubon's policy work and the Center for Birds of Prey on a variety of fronts. Most recently Scott, along with Elmwood Forest Productions Inc., produced two videos highlighting the Center and its newest education initiative funded in part by Progress Energy - Eagle Eyes on the Environment [E3]. Using the iconic Bald Eagle, the program will deliver programs related to the W.E.B. – Water, Energy and Birds are All Connected.

Scott shares why programs like these are so important. "As our society grows so does its impact on our environment. The survival of critical ecosystems depend more on actions of today than promises of tomorrow. Hence, finding innovative means of connecting mankind, and particularly our new generation, to sustainable ecosystem solutions is critical to all of us. The wonder that is nature begins for many with a simple encounter with the magnificence of the Bald Eagle. Audubon helps to make the connection between birds and the survival of mankind."

Donors such as Deb Carrier and Scott Taylor are vital to the sustainability of education programs at Corkscrew and the Center for Birds of Prey. Donors fund education scholarships, support teacher education, contribute to needed supplies and materials, and embrace emerging programs such as the Conservation Leadership Initiative for college students. Support can be in the form of an outright donation or planned gift.

To learn how to leave your legacy for environmental education or more about how to connect children with nature through Audubon's Centers and programs, contact Margaret Hankinson Spontak at (352) 229-2887 or email mspontak@audubon.org. A behind the scenes tour or program briefing can help you see first hand the importance of Audubon's work and the Centers education programs.



Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary Leadership Update

After 38 years with Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, Ed Carlson, 62, retired his position as director of the legendary Audubon preserve located in the heart of the western Everglades. He will continue to serve on the newly-formed Corkscrew board and as “director emeritus” of the Sanctuary, announced Eric Draper, executive director of Audubon Florida. Carlson’s retirement was effective June 30.

“Ed Carlson took a little-known swamp and made it into the premier outdoor environmental education center in Southwest Florida,” Eric Draper said. “In recognition of his long service and incomparable achievements, Audubon is proud to accord him the title of ‘director emeritus.’”

“Ed has trained a terrific group of the next generation of conservation leaders, who will assume leadership of Corkscrew,” Draper continued.

Management of the 13,000-acre Sanctuary, which includes the largest stand of bald cypress in North America, will be assumed by the newly-appointed director, Jason Lauritsen. Lauritsen joined Corkscrew in 2001 as natural resource manager and was promoted to assistant director in 2007. He is responsible for wildlife and land management, and involved in policy work affecting restoration of habitat in Big Cypress and the western Everglades.

Directing the Blair Audubon Center will be Rebecca Beck, who has focused on developing visitor and elementary education programs throughout her 10-year tenure at Corkscrew. She will manage center operations and develop high-quality experiences for Corkscrew’s 100,000 annual visitors who traverse its 2.25 mile boardwalk through five diverse habitats, including the 600-year old bald cypress forest.

Audubon Florida’s Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary is open daily and is located at 375 Sanctuary Road, 30 miles east of Naples and 40 miles southeast of Ft. Myers, off Immokalee Road. Visit <http://corkscrew.audubon.org> or phone 239-348-9151 for hours and visitor information.



Jason Lauritsen
Sanctuary Director



Rebecca Beck
Center Director

Audubon Florida Staff

Audubon Florida

fl.audubon.org
444 Brickell Avenue, Ste. 850, Miami, FL 33131-2407
305-371-6399

Key Contacts

Eric Draper, Executive Director
305-371-6399, ext.123 • edraper@audubon.org

Margaret Spontak, Development Director
352-229-2887 • mspontak@audubon.org

Victoria Johnston, Donor Relations Manager
305-371-6399, ext. 134 • vjohnston@audubon.org

Public Policy Office

<http://fl.audubon.org/conservation-efforts>
308 N. Monroe St., Tallahassee, FL 32301
850-222-2473

Local Audubon Chapters

<http://fl.audubon.org/audubon-locations>
Jacqueline Sulek
386-497-4185 • jsulek@audubon.org

EVERGLADES CONSERVATION

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary

Jason Lauritsen, Sanctuary Director
375 Sanctuary Rd. West, Naples, FL 34120-4865
239- 229-8170

Rebecca Beck, Center Director
239-348-9151, ext. 114

Everglades Policy

Julie Hill-Gabriel, Director of Everglades Policy
305-371-6399, ext. 136

Everglades Water Quality

Charles Lee, Director of Advocacy • 407- 620-5178

Lake Okeechobee Watershed Program

Paul Gray, Ph.D., Science Coordinator
863-655-1831

Southwest Florida Collier Audubon Policy Office

Brad Cornell, Big Cypress Policy Associate
239-643-7822

Everglades Science Center

Jerome Lorenz, Ph.D., State Director of Research
305-852-5318

Keys Environmental Restoration Fund

Jeanette Hobbs, Manager • 305-289-9988

BIRDS AND COASTAL STEWARDSHIP

Coastal Wildlife and Habitats

Julie Wraithmell, Director of Wildlife Conservation
850-222-BIRD (2473)

Important Bird Areas

Marianne Korosy, Florida IBA Coordinator
(727) 742-1683

Coastal Islands Sanctuaries

Ann Paul, Tampa Bay Area Regional Coord.
813-623-6826

FLORIDA SPECIAL PLACES

Center for Birds of Prey

Katie Warner, Center Manager
1101 Audubon Way, Maitland, FL 32751-5451
407-644-0190

For additional staff contacts and locations go to
fl.audubon.org/node/19446



Audubon Florida
 444 Brickell Avenue, Suite 850, Miami FL 33131
 Tel: 305-371-6399 Fax: 305-371-6398
fl.audubon.org

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President and Executive Director *Eric Draper*

Development Director and Naturalist Editor *Margaret Spontak*

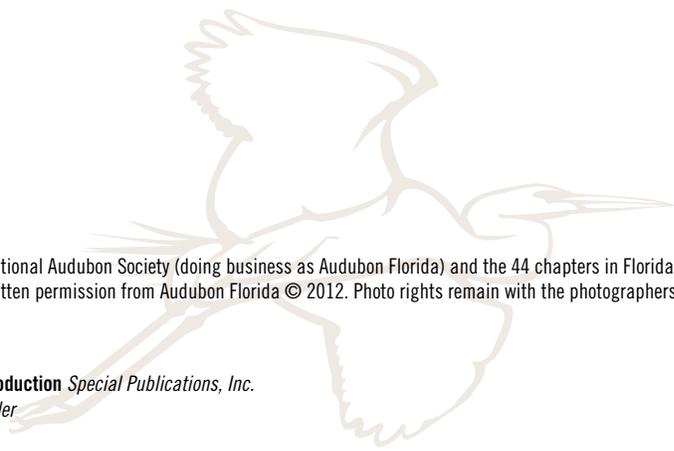
Cover Photo *Jim Urbach*

Post Production Assistance: *Victoria Johnson*

Contributors *Monique Borboen, Eric Draper, John Elting, Julie Hill-Gabriel, Charles Lee, Mark Rachal, Jacqui Sulek, Margaret Spontak, Megan Tinsley, Julie Wraithmel and Mary Jean Yon*

Photographers *Monique Borboen, Mike Dubi, Richard Holder, Billie Knight, Reinier Munguia, Lori Piper, Jacqui Sulek, Greg Stephens, Mac Stone, Scott Taylor, Lucy Beebe Tobias, Jim Urbach, Susan Warren, RJ Wiley and George Willson*

Design and Production *Special Publications, Inc.*
Artist *Jessi Miller*



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Conserve Water to Sustain Life

October 26-27, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Sarasota

Special features included in this edition:

- Two-page conference agenda
- Interview with keynote speaker Cynthia Barnett
- Water conservation section – Water for the Everglades, Coasts, and Florida’s Special Places
- Water Policy Recommendations
- Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary Update

Notice of Florida Audubon Society Annual Membership Meeting

Pursuant to the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws, notice is hereby given that the annual meeting of the Florida Audubon Society will be held at the Hyatt Regency, Sarasota, Florida at 1:45 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 27.



Photos of the beach, bay and kayaking courtesy Visit Sarasota County.