



Audubon | FLORIDA

Naturalist

Fall 2022



Barred Owl at
Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.
Photo: Preeti Desai/Audubon



Heidi McCree, Board Chair

We are so happy to be able to flock together in person this year for the 2022 Audubon Florida Assembly. Birds not only sing to each other, they call on us to protect their breeding habitat (page 4 and 5), tackle climate change to forge a resilient future for all (page 6 and 12), pass legislation intended to conserve critical natural resources (page 6 and 14), and more. That's why

I am so excited about the "Birds Tell Us" theme for our October convention in Fort Myers, Florida. From the knowledge we gain from bird bands, to what birding is teaching young enthusiasts and those brand new to the environmental movement, to how community science efforts to monitor avian populations drive our policy and conservation work, we are always learning from our feathered friends.

I hope you will join us for Assembly this year. I know I'll be there with a huge smile on my face, saying "Hi" not only to the birds we'll find on exciting field trips in Southwest Florida, but also to my fellow Audubon members, volunteers, and friends. See you soon!

Heidi McCree, *Board Chair, Audubon Florida*



Julie Wraithmell, Executive Director

I don't toss around the word "landmark" very often, but I can say with confidence that 2022 has proven to be a landmark year both for conservation and in our fight against climate change. Congress passed the Inflation Reduction Act, which will propel the United States forward in our quest to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. Reducing the impacts of climate change will not only help communities vulnerable to natural disasters and pollution, but also gives birds hope for a more stable and resilient future; after all, climate change is the number one threat birds are facing today.

On the state level, the Florida Forever and Rural and Family Lands Protection programs have conserved more than 36,000 acres in 2022 alone, including 19,800+ acres in the most recent August cabinet meeting. These protected lands preserve habitat, improve the health of our watersheds, and keep forests working to provide products for people and homes for wildlife. And our local advocates, from members to chapters and more, are bringing home the conservation dollars to their counties, including in upcoming referendums in Polk and Pasco counties, as well as an ordinance up for a vote in Seminole County.

Pushing important legislation through can be unglamorous work, but you have made your voices heard and you are standing up for birds and the places they need. I hope we can look back on 2022 as a true turning point in our work to safeguard natural resources while creating a more resilient future in the face of climate change. Thank you, donors, members, volunteers, advocates, and birders, for building the momentum we need to truly make a difference in the lives of both birds and people.

Julie Wraithmell, *Executive Director, Audubon Florida*

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REGISTER NOW

2022 Audubon Assembly

Birds Tell Us.

OCTOBER 13-15

Held in person at the Luminary Hotel in downtown Fort Myers, this year's event centers on the theme "Birds Tell Us."

With learning sessions, a keynote presentation, awards, and field trips to some of the birdiest hotspots in Southwest Florida, Assembly is a great opportunity to network with Audubon members, staff, and volunteers across the state.

THURSDAY | OCTOBER 13

- Field trips to Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary
- Self-guided walks to Edison and Ford Winter Estates
- Evening Social

FRIDAY | OCTOBER 14

- Field trips include visits to an FPL solar site at Babcock Ranch, Caloosahatchee Creeks Preserve, Bunche Beach Preserve, Billy Creek Preserve, as well as a Walking History Tour of Downtown Ft. Myers and an Eco River Charter Tour
- Learning Sessions: check the landing page for learning session details
- Awards Banquet featuring a keynote by Marshall Johnson, National Audubon's Chief Conservation Officer

SATURDAY | OCTOBER 15

- Breakfast
- Chapter Celebration
- Plenary: Birds Tell Us



This year's keynote speaker will be Marshall Johnson, Chief Conservation Officer of the National Audubon Society. He will share how Audubon staff and community scientists are helping us understand what birds are telling us about the most important conservation issues of our time.

Hooded Warbler.
Photo: John A. Middleton, Jr.

Contact Renee Wilson with questions: reneewilson@audubon.org

**Visit fl.audubon.org/assembly
for updates and registration details.**

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING of the membership of The Florida Audubon Society. Pursuant to the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws, notice is hereby given that the Annual Membership Meeting of the Florida Audubon Society will be held at 1 p.m. on Saturday, October 15, 2022. The meeting agenda will be to receive a financial report and hear any comments of the membership to the Board of Directors. A Meeting of the Board will follow immediately upon the conclusion of the Membership Meeting. For questions, contact Adrienne Ruhl at Adrienne.Ruhl@audubon.org.

Coastal Nesting Birds Made Hay During Quiet Early Hurricane Season, Fledging Chicks From Florida Beaches

With a late start to the tropical storm season, no hurricanes, and the full force of our staff and volunteer steward protection efforts, birds across our beaches successfully fledged chicks.

NORTHWEST FLORIDA BEACHES AND BARRIER ISLANDS

The Navarre Causeway fledged more than 50 Black Skimmer chicks this season. The offshore and remote habitats of the Eastern Panhandle proved to be especially successful for breeding Snowy Plovers: this vulnerable species fledged 11 birds from Dog Island and an additional four at Little St. George Island. Nesting sites monitored by Audubon Florida biologists also fledged seven American Oystercatcher chicks in the region. Additionally, Panhandle staff monitored 54 suitable and historically occupied nesting rooftops across a five-county region. Staff found 15 of these rooftops to have active nesting by Least Terns.

NORTHEAST FLORIDA BEACHES AND BARRIER ISLANDS

Like many shorebird conservation seasons, 2022 proved to be a combination of successes and failures in Northeast Florida. Erosion impacted Least Tern nesting at Anastasia State Park and Fort Matanzas National Monument, but local birds found some success at less-frequented locations like the beach at Summer Haven. Inundation at Julia's Island hampered the nesting of American Oystercatchers, Wilson's Plovers, and Least Terns at the site, but the terns did hang on and fledge some young. Huguenot Memorial Park produced fewer Royal Terns than usual. A bright spot was the emergence of new nesting islands in Nassau Sound — and despite tough conditions many young Gull-billed Terns and Black Skimmers fledged (learn more on page 10).

SOUTHWEST FLORIDA BEACHES AND BARRIER ISLANDS

In Collier County, Wilson's Plovers, Least Terns, and Black Skimmers nested and raised chicks. While all three species nested on Second Chance Critical Wildlife Area (CWA), only the Wilson's Plovers and Black Skimmers successfully fledged chicks there. Across Collier beaches, Wilson's Plovers fledged 16 chicks, Black Skimmers had 98 fledges, and Least Terns fledged between 120-130 chicks, including 19 at Big Marco Pass — a first since 2019.



Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Tours Audubon Natural Infrastructure Project

Living shorelines reduce erosion and protect habitat for both birds and people. Florida Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Shawn Hamilton toured Audubon's Alafia Banks living shoreline with Audubon Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuary Manager Mark Rachal and Board Chair Heidi McCree to see firsthand how natural infrastructure can successfully tackle both sea level rise and erosion.

In Lee County, Audubon staff worked with partners to steward and conserve nesting sea- and shorebirds at both the privately-owned Carlos Beach and the Little Estero Island CWA, where this season we reported Black Skimmers, Least Terns, Wilson's Plovers, and Snowy Plovers. Despite being plagued with some early season flooding, Least Terns fledged approximately 55 chicks, while Black Skimmers were expecting approximately 74 fledges at the end of August. We also recorded two Snowy Plover and 13 Wilson's Plover chicks fledged.

Importantly, Audubon assisted with the creation of a new stewardship program at Cayo Costa State Park this year, which ended up being the site of Lee County's only successful American Oystercatcher nest.



A Least Tern chick rests on a gravel rooftop. Though not ideal habitat, many gravel rooftop sites successfully fledged dozens of sea and shorebird chicks again this year. Photo taken with a telephoto lens with permission from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Photo: Kara Cook/Audubon Florida

TAMPA BAY REGION ROOFTOPS

Gravel rooftops are not an ideal habitat for nesting but serve as an alternative for birds crowded off beaches by recreational uses. Unfortunately, many gravel rooftops are reaching the end of their lifespans, and building owners are increasingly replacing them with newer materials compliant with updated building codes, but unsuitable for nesting. This season, 11 gravel rooftops were converted in Tampa Bay alone. We experienced a lull in reroofing projects due to supply chain issues the last two seasons but are now back to business as usual. Despite the roofs we lost, we were excited to learn that birds found seven other gravel roofs on which to nest. Overall, we had 35 active roofs in the Tampa Bay region — up four from last season.

In partnership with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission rooftop biologists and willing property managers, we installed 3,615 feet of protective chick-fencing to prevent chicks from falling off their rooftop nest sites. We also installed 145 chick-shelters to provide shade and cover from avian predators.

Audubon and partners are still confirming final tallies for this season but estimate that our rooftop fledglings included at least 18 Black Skimmers and five American Oystercatchers, with roughly 700 breeding adult Least Terns across all regional rooftops.

TAMPA BAY REGION BEACHES AND BARRIER ISLANDS

With more than 3,000 hours of stewardship from dedicated Audubon volunteers at seven nesting sites, we counted 630 fledged Black Skimmers, four fledged American Oystercatchers,

and multiple fledged Wilson's Plovers and Snowy Plovers. Staff and volunteers recorded thousands of fledging Royal Terns, Sandwich Terns, Caspian Terns, and Laughing Gulls. Importantly, we educated more than 17,600 people on the beach — thanks to these efforts, more nesting sites experienced minimal human-initiated disturbances and similar intrusions throughout the spring and summer.

FLORIDA COASTAL ISLANDS SANCTUARIES

The Florida Coastal Island Sanctuaries team surveyed more than 75 sites throughout Tampa Bay and Southwest Florida to census colonial-nesting waterbirds. Biologists and volunteers documented a successful breeding season, with more than 100 Roseate Spoonbills fledged at the Richard T. Paul Alafia Bank Critical Wildlife Area, leased from and managed in collaboration with The Mosaic Company and Port Tampa Bay, and at least 18 Reddish Egret chicks fledged across multiple sites. Additionally, staff worked with Port Tampa Bay and the Army Corps of Engineers to ensure a productive nesting season for beach-nesting birds including American Oystercatchers, Black Skimmers, and five species of terns at spoil islands in Hillsborough Bay.

Coastal team members hit the beaches and barrier islands every summer to educate beach-goers and boaters on how to keep vulnerable breeding birds safe.



Federal Climate Bill and What It Means for Florida

In August, President Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (IRA), authorizing major new federal investment in meeting the challenge of climate change. The new law provides unprecedented levels of funding for renewable energy, climate resilience, agriculture, forestry, and environmental justice initiatives.

While this bill is expansive, the elements we are most excited about include:

» **Extension and expansion of clean energy:** The IRA makes additional technologies like energy storage and biogas eligible for tax credits, and transitions to a technology-neutral credit so that the amount of emissions reduction potential is the primary criterion, rather than the technology itself. The bill also provides billions of dollars for grants and loans for new clean energy manufacturing, repair and upgrade of transmission infrastructure, and incentives for developing domestic supply chains for critical minerals.



» **Climate-smart agriculture and resilience:** Our fields, forests, and other working lands play a critical role in naturally storing carbon and reducing emissions. The IRA would provide \$19.9 billion to support implementation of conservation practices on farms, ranches, orchards, and forests across the country. These practices can also help promote drought resilience in the West through river restoration projects, habitat restoration, and irrigation management and efficiency.

» **DOE Loans Program Office (LPO):** The LPO is the part of the Energy Department that finances large-scale infrastructure projects. The IRA would give over \$70 billion in new loan authority for the LPO, which is critical to expanding clean energy and transmission, as well as updating infrastructure to meet climate threats and ensuring that new projects are designed with conservation of existing environments in mind.

» **Environmental and Climate Justice:** Conservation is more than just protecting wild spaces and wildlife. It also means prioritizing investments to build healthy communities and restore communities that have historically shouldered the burden of pollution and climate change. The IRA will provide block grants of \$2.8 billion through FY 2026 for environmental justice grants, including community-led air pollution monitoring, prevention, and remediation. Additionally, many of the tax credits provided for in the bill increase in value if they directly affect communities that have been disproportionately affected by climate change, including Black and brown, Indigenous, and lower-income communities.

The largest existential threat facing Florida is climate change, and this legislation is necessary for the protection of our special places, our incredible natural resources, and our inland and coastal communities. With nearly \$369 billion in direct investment — which includes \$20 billion to help farmers and ranchers adopt practices to increase their land's resilience to climate change — this legislation has far-reaching impacts. It is by far the most meaningful step our nation has taken to work towards building resiliency in recent years.

» The Inflation Reduction Act includes \$20 billion to help farmers and ranchers increase their resilience to climate change — critical funding that will protect birds and other species that depend on these landscapes in Florida. Photo: Marianne Korosy



► The new seepage wall will reduce flooding in this community while allowing the remainder of the water to continue flowing through the Everglades. Photo: SFWMD

New Water Seepage Barrier Key to Restoring Everglades

For years, developers built too close to the Everglades, harming habitat but also putting communities at risk for perennial flooding problems. Located in western Miami-Dade County on the east side of Everglades National Park, a low-lying residential community called the 8.5 Square Mile Area (8.5 SMA) has been plagued by such flooding for decades.

One of the primary goals of restoring the Everglades is to send more fresh water south, eventually to Florida Bay, mimicking the original path of water as much as possible. This will lead to recharged aquifers, the return of more wetland species, and a revived ecosystem. The 8.5 SMA has been a barrier to moving this water to the tip of Florida; because of its geographic footprint within Everglades National Park, it lacks flood control, thus farms and homes are continually experiencing high water. For many years, the community of government entities and affected stakeholders have tried to

come up with a solution, including attempts to buy out landowners, to no avail. They ultimately agreed on an underground seepage barrier, and the next phase of the project is about to come to life!



◀ Anhinga. Photo:
Gary Robinette
/Audubon
Photography
Awards



The Central Everglades Planning Project
New Water Seepage Barrier extends almost five miles north of the **8.5 Square Mile Area Limited Curtain Wall Project** pictured here. It will help prevent flooding to the east by keeping water to the west in Everglades National Park. Map: SFWMD

In a collaboration between the South Florida Water Management District and the Army Corps of Engineers, 4.9 miles of new seepage wall — the Central Everglades Planning Project New Water Seepage Barrier — will be built as a northern extension to the 2.3-mile curtain wall around the 8.5 SMA that broke ground last year. Rainfall events have proven that the first section of the wall effectively reduces flooding, but the extension will be necessary to ensure flood protection from restoration efforts that will eventually bring even more water to an Everglades that desperately needs it.

“Audubon is excited to see the approval of this seepage wall expansion on the eastern edge of Everglades National Park — it’s a long-awaited solution to a complex problem that has faced many water management district governing boards. We have needed a solution to protect these communities from flooding while supporting increased water flow south, enabling Everglades restoration to proceed. We are hopeful this underground barrier will mitigate flood impacts while keeping freshwater where it is needed most, in the Everglades, destined for Florida Bay.”
— Julie Wraithmell, Executive Director of Audubon Florida

The Army Corps just completed their comment period on the draft Environmental Impact Assessment and the project is anticipated to take two years to complete.



Willow the Barred Owl was rescued not once but twice, and became a patient at the Raptor Clinic. The Raptor Clinic admits more than 700 birds each year, with a busy baby bird season from April through June.

New Ambassador Barred Owl Joins the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey Flock

We are excited to welcome a new, unique raptor to the Center for Birds of Prey.

This young Barred Owl first arrived at the Center's Raptor Trauma clinic on March 30 after a fall from his nest. Upon evaluation, staff did not find injuries and we reunited this youngster with his parents one day later. Unfortunately, a storm event caused a second fall, resulting in a dislocated shoulder and wing injury. Though his wounds have healed, his wing injury was significant and prevented his release back into the wild.

This owl's unique, dark coloring is called melanism, meaning he carries an overabundance of melanin in his feathers.

As our newest Ambassador bird, this owl will play a special role at the Center for Birds of Prey. Our feathered ambassadors give visitors an up-close view of Florida's amazing raptors and inspire all of us to care for these birds of prey that live in our neighborhoods and natural landscapes.

Because of his important role at the Center, we asked for help in choosing his name. The Center for Birds of Prey held a fundraiser and voting opportunity: nearly half chose Willow.

The care of our ambassadors costs thousands of dollars each year. Funds are needed for the annual care of this new ambassador including food, housing, medical exams, enrichment, and training.

Does this Barred Owl look different than your neighborhood birds? Willow's unique, dark coloring is called melanism, meaning he carries an overabundance of melanin in his feathers.



If you are interested in making a donation to care for our ambassador birds like Willow, contact Rosa Rivera at Rosa.Rivera@audubon.org



Ghost orchids are rare, flowering plants that rely on extremely sensitive wetland habitats and are only known to live in South Florida and Cuba. At the Sanctuary, we work year-round to protect and maintain the precise habitat needed by specialist species like this to thrive. Photo: RJ Wiley

DONOR DOLLARS AT WORK

If you've ever visited Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, you might have noticed an offshoot of the public boardwalk just after the north Lettuce Lake. This section, called the Corkscrew Learning Amphitheater and Student Sanctuary (C.L.A.S.S.), is a dedicated boardwalk area for youth education and special programs or events. It has been completely closed for the past few years awaiting repair. Thanks to the generosity of more than 100 donors who answered our call for support this past April, the repairs are now complete! The renovation of this area was finished just in time for our summer camp programs, as well as the guided "forest bathing meditation" we hosted during the National Hammock Day Event at the Sanctuary on July 22. The amphitheater is now available for other public programming. Take a quick trip to the C.L.A.S.S. loop through this short video, and be sure to turn up the volume!



Watch the short film at:
https://youtu.be/22JmvIm7_jw

HAVE YOU SEEN A GHOST?

Like tiny fireworks, the first buds on the "Super" ghost orchid at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary began blooming in time for the July Fourth holiday weekend. The "Super" ghost orchid is so named because of its record-breaking number of blossoms. The "Super" ghost orchid, located about 70 feet off the ground and roughly 100 feet away from the boardwalk, bloomed all summer despite a few caterpillars that had been munching on its blossoms. This is nature taking its course and the plant, itself, is not damaged. Luckily, the Sanctuary provides the perfect habitat for an unknown number of these delicate plants. The "Super" ghost orchid typically blooms into October. To see it, binoculars or telephoto zoom lens are recommended.

Donor Dollars Made a BIG Difference!

July 2021 - June 2022

906

STUDENTS
inspired by
outdoor education

252

ACRES
mulched

520

SQUARE FEET
of boardwalk repaired

17

HOURS
of Wood Stork
monitoring flight time

390

ACRES TREATED
with prescribed fire

42

SUMMER CAMPERS
immersed in
all things swamp



Students ready to learn at the newly renovated amphitheater.



 Birds successfully bred on the new island in Northeast Florida, helped by few storms, volunteer efforts, and prescient protections. Photo: Pat Leary

Northeast Florida – New Islands, New Breeding Bird Successes

The low-lying islands appeared as if from nowhere this spring in Northeast Florida's Nassau Sound. As a natural result of shifting sediments in the bay, the shoals had gathered enough sand to break the water line, presenting a unique opportunity for nesting birds in the area.

Long-time volunteers Pat and Doris Leary wondered if the new islands — far away from the busy beaches — would remain above tide and if local shorebirds would take a chance on this tenuous but attractive habitat. And, if the birds did nest there, could they be protected from disturbance in this recreationist's paradise? Luckily, foresight meant that the law was on their side: When the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) redesignated the Nassau Sounds Critical Wildlife Area (CWA) in 2016, they drew boundaries large enough to include emergent islands just like these ones. The new breeding spots automatically gained CWA protection. But would that be enough?

Leary reached out to Chris Farrell, Audubon Florida's Northeast Florida Policy Associate, as well as regional staff from FWC, to urge posting of the largest island right away. The Learys surveyed the island and found that a pair of American Oystercatchers had scoped out the area, but already faced impacts by recreationists. FWC, the Learys, and Audubon staff immediately jumped into action, posting "No Boat Landing" signs in early May, before the summer breeding season for sea and shorebirds really heated up.

With signs in place, the team still had many concerns. Would the island actually remain high enough to protect eggs and chicks during exceptionally high tides or storm surges? Would the signs hold against the wind and tides? Would boaters heed the signs and stay off the island? There was nothing to do but wait and watch.



 Audubon staff, volunteers, and agency partners post "No Landing" signs to protect the nesting birds from boat disturbance. Photo: Pat Leary

Birds flocked to the island. Surveyors counted 195 Black Skimmers, 40 Gull-billed Terns, around 100 Least Terns, a pair of American Oystercatchers, and various other seabirds. Despite some erosion and overwash issues, the first chicks hatching in late June prompted celebrations. By July, hopes soared even higher: chicks and fledglings of all ages now dotted the island with only a few weeks left until they could safely fly to higher ground and eventually move to other coastal beaches as they prepare for migration. By mid-August, more than a dozen Gull-billed Terns had fledged, in addition to more than 30 Black Skimmers. Even a storm surge caused by a passing Nor'easter didn't end the nesting season, and chicks fledged throughout August and into September.

Gull-billed Terns and Black Skimmers are sensitive to human disturbance, and their discovery of the new nesting site and ultimately successful breeding season is a huge boon to these vulnerable species. This win would not have been possible without Audubon and our partners' steadfast advocacy for the redesignated CWA in 2016 with the expanded boundaries, nor would birds have safely raised chicks on the new island without the quick action and continued monitoring by staff and volunteers of the Timucuan Shorebird Partnership.

Audubon and Florida Park Service Team Up for Dry Prairie Conservation

A NEW BUNKHOUSE WILL BE CONSTRUCTED AT KISSIMMEE PRAIRIE PRESERVE STATE PARK.

Audubon and the Florida Park Service have signed an historic agreement for Audubon to fund construction of a “bunkhouse” on the Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park (Preserve). The 58,000-acre Preserve conserves the largest remaining tract of Florida’s unique dry prairie ecosystem and is in a remote corner of Okeechobee County. Limited housing makes it hard for the Preserve to host visiting workers, researchers, and fire crews, and this bunkhouse will help fill that large void to give more people access to this ecological treasure.

Audubon has protected birds and the places they need in the region since the 1930s. In 1980, Audubon purchased 7,300 acres to create a prairie Sanctuary, which was later sold to the Florida Park Service and combined with state-owned land to create the Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park. Money from the sale was placed in an endowment, from which funds to purchase the bunk house have been drawn.

Audubon’s Paul Gray, PhD, Everglades Science Coordinator, says, “Since protecting the Preserve, the Florida Park Service has been doing an exceptional job of managing and restoring this piece of ‘The Real

Florida.’ And to have gotten to this next milestone in dry prairie conservation, which has been a uniquely Audubon effort, is immeasurably rewarding.”

“The new bunkhouse is a welcome and needed addition to Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park, and we’re thankful to our partners at Audubon for their generosity. The bunkhouse will serve to house wildlife surveyors whose work begins before dawn, prescribed fire teams who are traveling in from out of town, and Americorps members who graciously volunteer their time and energy to the park.”

— Chuck Hatcher, Florida State Parks Director

Dry prairies occupy very flat areas and comprise some of the most diverse plant communities in North America. The prairies of central Florida are home to a unique suite of birds that includes the Florida Sandhill Crane, Audubon’s Crested Caracara, Burrowing Owl, Mottled Duck, and one of the nation’s most endangered birds, the Florida Grasshopper Sparrow. The extensive wetland complexes also host a variety of wading and water birds.

The new bunkhouse at Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park will allow visiting researchers and land management staff to continue to protect the rare and vulnerable species that depend on dry prairie habitat.

Photo: Paul Gray/Audubon Florida



Audubon's Write for Climate Program Primes Pen of Next Generation

Audubon Florida is empowering the next generation's voice in advocating for birds and the places they need. Our innovative "Write for Climate" program was designed to work with students to write op-eds and Letters to the Editor (LTEs) to influence issues in their local communities.

Write for Climate gives students the tools they need to advocate for crucial climate topics, including natural climate solutions, conservation, and renewable energy. The program spans three to four months: a typical semester. Upon program launch, students receive resources and a brief training on the value of op-eds and LTEs in the current media environment. Audubon staff outline how to use opinion pieces to move the needle on public discourse for the issues about which the students are most passionate. Students receive direct feedback from Audubon Florida's climate and communication teams to refine their writing skills before submitting their work for publication. In addition to advocating for conservation and climate change policies, op-eds and LTEs offer opportunities for students to polish their persuasive writing and add accomplishments to their portfolios before graduation.

Since the program's launch, Audubon has teamed up with college students and CLI participants to publish 16 op-eds and LTEs across the state.

"My favorite part was certainly the reception — it was very positive and has led to tangible advancements in my work, as I am now a board member of Suncoast Waterkeeper," explained Orion Morton, an alumnus from the New College of Florida.

Audubon Florida is expanding this opportunity to include new schools, programs, and participants by

partnering with Audubon Campus Chapters, dual-enrolled students, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and more around the state for the current fall semester.

» JUST A FEW OF OUR HEADLINES IN 2022:

Orlando Sentinel

For the birds, prioritize native plants

Letter to the Editor

Apr 27, 2022 Updated Apr 27, 2022



Save our waters!

Algae blooms. A phenomenon we fear with greater and greater frequency. Where I grew up near the Indian River Lagoon, blue-green algae blooms are the toxic menace I have witnessed firsthand, and I know the destructive power of green sludge suffocating waterways and aquatic creatures alike.

OP/ED

Reducing net-metering guts rooftop solar in Florida

Save our seagrass

Seagrass mitigation not a real-world solution | Another voice, Feb. 3

I fell in love with Florida's beaches at the early age of 6, and now as a coastal resident, environmental science major and Manatee County Audubon Society intern, I know first-hand how important coastal ecosystems are to our livelihood.

NATIONAL PARKS TRAVELER
Essential coverage of essential places

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE PARKS

Home » Op-Ed | Big Cypress Should Be Off-Limits For Oil Exploration, Production

Op-Ed | Big Cypress Should Be Off-Limits For Oil Exploration, Production



Left to Right, Top Row: Julie Wraithmell, Sastry Pamidi, PhD, Thomas J. Brown, Bottom Row: Husein Cumber, Syd Kitson

DID YOU MISS OUR INAUGURAL CLIMATE ENTREPRENEURSHIP PANEL? A RECORDING IS AVAILABLE!
Audubon debuted its first class of Florida Climate Entrepreneurs: Private sector innovators who are in the business of helping Florida meet the challenges of climate change while creating jobs in Florida's emerging climate economy. As part of the series, we hosted a panel discussion with industry leaders from across Florida who discussed both the opportunities and barriers of the Sunshine State's climate economy.



Watch the entire webinar at:
<https://youtu.be/tQ7EgFAdihw>

DONOR SPOTLIGHT:

Bishop Parker Foundation Protects Birds in Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries

Audubon Florida's Coastal Islands Sanctuaries (FCIS), established in 1934, is the leading authority in conservation, monitoring, and management of colonial waterbirds and their nesting islands in the Tampa Bay region. As an integral part of Audubon Florida's work in Southwest Florida, FCIS has worked to protect birds in Manatee County and beyond through management, science, and advocacy. Our primary focus is on protecting colonial wading birds and seabirds and the habitats that they rely on, including Brown Pelicans, state-Threatened Roseate Spoonbills, Reddish Egrets, American Oystercatchers, and federally-Threatened Wood Storks.



As part of the Tampa Bay Estuary, Manatee County's diverse coastal and freshwater wetlands provide important foraging and nesting habitat that are vital to sustain waterbird populations in Southwest Florida. FCIS regularly monitors ten breeding colonies in Manatee County, conducts annual fishing gear cleanups, reduces erosion using living shorelines, bands Brown Pelicans, provides guidance to land managers, and so much more.

Funding by the Bishop Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals of Manatee County will allow FCIS staff to focus on this work and build on their successes

in the years to come. FCIS aims to ensure that these special birds, including seven threatened species, can remain resilient in the face of human development in Manatee County and beyond.



A banded Brown Pelican.
Photo: Jeff Liechty/
Audubon Florida



Bald Eagle.
Photo:
Rosemary Tolliver



Have You Included Audubon in Your Estate Plans?

To keep protecting Florida's iconic birds and habitats for decades to come, Audubon Florida is planning to launch *Elevate*, a campaign to make strategic investments that advance our science and habitat protection, and create new opportunities for immersive education experiences.

As part of this effort, we have included a goal to document \$5 million in future bequest gifts from supporters—and we are happy to share that we are halfway there!

We hope you will join us in this effort by including Audubon in your estate plans or by letting us know that you already have identified Audubon as a beneficiary of your estate. Gifts from retirement accounts, wills, and trusts have been an important part of Audubon's history

and are essential to our future. Please take this simple, but impactful, step to let us know about your plans or to refresh your information with us if you have already made this thoughtful commitment.

Legacy gifts like these fuel our work to protect birds and the places they need now and into the future.



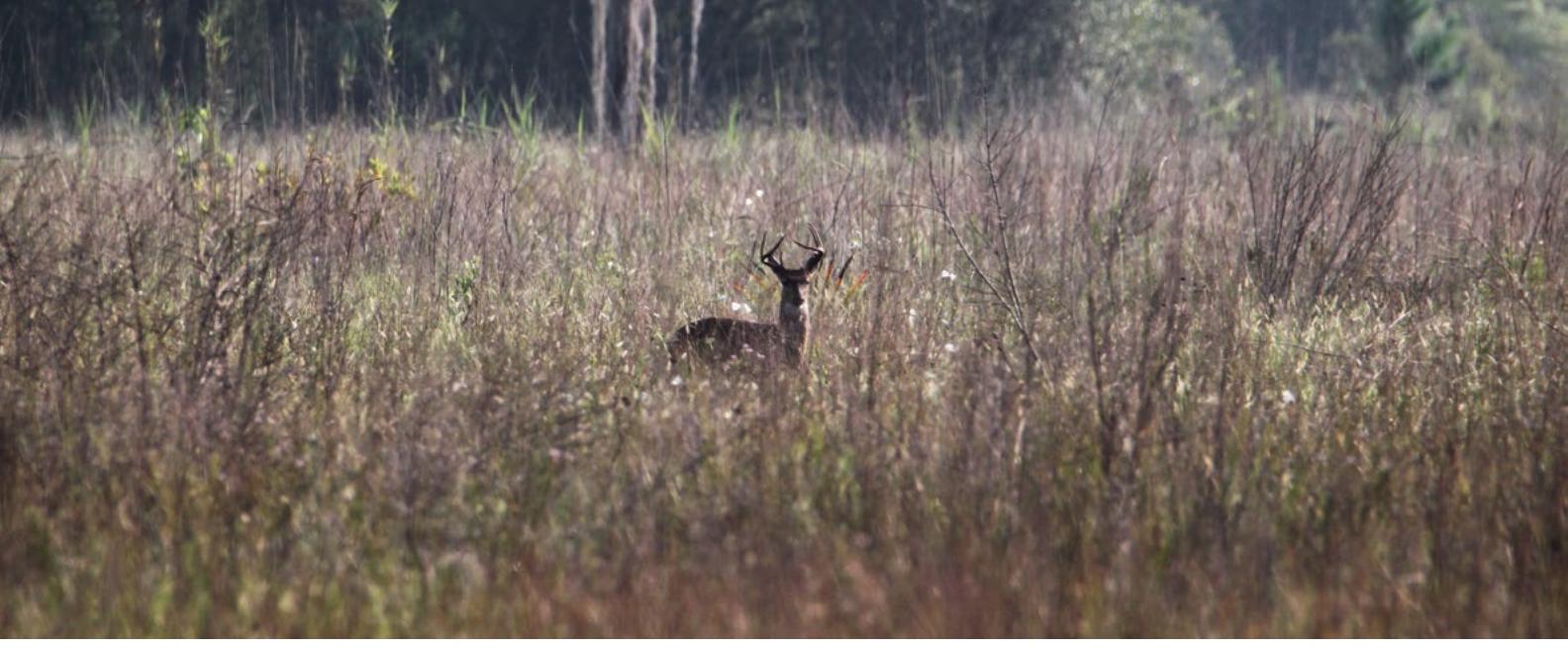
Contact Suzanne Bartlett:

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Or fill out this form:

<https://audubon.planyourlegacy.org/societyform.php>



On the Ballot: Chapters Advocate for Local Land Conservation Initiatives

County land conservation programs are an important part of protecting Florida's natural resources, and are often created by county commissions or through local ballot measures. Audubon's chapters have been instrumental in several proposals under consideration soon.

POLK COUNTY

In November, Polk County voters will decide whether to rededicate 20 cents per \$1,000 of taxable property to land acquisition. Such a tax existed in the county from 1994 through 2015 and formed a critical fund for conservation and restoration of 25,000 acres. The funding would complement existing sources of state funding, purchasing smaller parcels of land that are needed to protect special places for both wildlife and people. The re-upped source of conservation dollars could raise more than \$8 million each year.

PASCO COUNTY

Also in November, Pasco County residents will decide whether to renew "Penny for Pasco" for another 15 years. Slated to end in 2024, "Penny for Pasco" adds an additional one percent sales tax to fund not only parks and park improvements, but also schools, public safety, roads, and more. Twenty percent of the nearly \$2 billion estimated to be raised between 2025 and 2039 would go to parks and environmental lands.

County conservation programs play a critical role in safeguarding habitat that may not be protected through state or federal programs, ensuring survival of some of Florida's most iconic species, like the American Kestrel.
Photo: Joshua Pelta Heller/Audubon Photography Awards



At Audubon, we work closely with chapters to protect land at the municipal, county, state, and federal level.
Photo: Donald Sawin

SEMINOLE COUNTY

Seminole Forever would mirror the successful state-level Florida Forever program, using \$5 million from the county budget to fund land acquisition and improvement each year (the money would originate from a combination of the general fund, tourism fund, as well as bonds). Instead of a referendum, the county commissioners are looking to pass an ordinance at the end of September, giving the funds to an Acquisition, Recovery, and Management Committee to choose properties and disperse payments each year.

Thank you to the chapters — Seminole Audubon, Lake Region Audubon, and West Pasco Audubon — for their efforts on these issues!



Florida Cabinet and Governor Approve 19,800+ Acres for Conservation

At the August cabinet meeting, the Governor and Cabinet approved conservation projects that included a mix of fee title purchases and conservation easements to permanently protect more than 19,800 acres, or a total area of 31 square miles, through the Florida Forever and Rural & Family Lands Protection programs (RFLPP). By permanently protecting these areas, we are preserving critical headwaters, working forests, and recreation areas while protecting the habitat of some of Florida's most iconic bird species, including Florida Scrub-Jays and Burrowing Owls.

“These significant conservation decisions demonstrate how Florida Forever and the Rural and Family Lands Protection programs work together to steward the Sunshine State’s critical natural resources. As our state grows and develops so should our attention to preserving Florida’s special places. We need all the tools in our toolbox to protect our natural landscapes through fair, transparent processes.”

— Julie Wraithmell, Executive Director of Audubon Florida



PROTECTED VIA CONSERVATION EASEMENT:

- 615 acres within the Crippen Properties, Okeechobee County (Florida Forever)
- 3,634 acres within Abington Preserve, Okeechobee County (Florida Forever)
- 11,958 acres within Horse Creek, DeSoto, and Hardee counties (Florida Forever)
- 633 acres within the Hendrie Ranch, Highlands County (Rural and Family Lands Protection Program)
- 1,883 acres within the Buck Island Ranch, Highlands County (Rural and Family Lands Protection Program)

PROTECTED VIA FEE SIMPLE PURCHASE:

- 376 acres within the St. Joe Timberland project, Franklin County (Florida Forever)
- 768 acres within Wolfe Creek project, Santa Rosa County (Florida Forever)

RURAL & FAMILY LANDS PROTECTION PROGRAM

RFLPP is an agricultural easement program managed by the Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services and the Florida Forest Service to protect important agricultural lands through the acquisition of permanent land conservation easements. This program partners with federal programs such as the Department of Defense and Natural Resources Conservation Service, leveraging state appropriated funds dollar for dollar with these federal sources.

As working lands are under increasing economic pressure to be divided and sold, RFLPP preserves our rural landscapes, allowing Florida's landowners to preserve agricultural land, keeping it in their ownership while helping to protect our state's precious natural resources.

FLORIDA FOREVER PROGRAM

Since 2001, more than 800,000 acres have been protected through the Florida Forever program, which has enjoyed broad public support statewide. These properties and more make up Florida's award-winning state park system, wildlife management area system, state forest system, and other parks and preserves for the enjoyment of Floridians and visitors alike.



Thanks to the Florida Forever and Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, more than 19,000 acres were protected this August, including habitat for the vulnerable Burrowing Owl. Photo: Jolie Gordon/Audubon Photography Awards



Black-bellied Whistling-Duck.
Photo: Jayden Preussner/
Audubon Photography Awards

The 2022 National Audubon Society Photography Award Winner in the “Youth” Category is from Florida!

Jayden Preussner photographed a Black-bellied Whistling-Duck in Indian River County to take home the prize.

He explains: “I set out along a dike and levee system that puts you at eye level with trees and saw a pair of Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks sitting on a hollowed out palm. Before I knew it, one looked as if it had simply fallen in.* The other peered down the trunk, seemingly thinking, ‘What an idiot.’ My friend and I burst out laughing. The scene was silly, but now I look back and think: That was a nice shot of the birds interacting with their environment. Showcasing those relationships is important to me.”

***View all the award-winning photos at:
<https://bit.ly/3R6xZVP>***

*They are cavity nesters, and were nesting or investigating a cavity for potential nesting.



Protect the birds and we protect the Earth.

STAY IN TOUCH: fl.audubon.org/keep-touch



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