



Audubon | FLORIDA

Naturalist

Summer 2023



Black-necked Stilt.

Photo: Peter Brannon/Audubon Photography Awards.



Heidi McCree, Board Chair

For many, summer can be a slow season. School is out, life's pace is relaxed, holidays mean extra time with friends and family. But at Audubon, summer means our work is heating up!

In addition to announcing our Assembly dates from October 26-28 (in the Tampa Bay region—registration is open), the summer brings collaboration in Northeast Florida on climate issues (pg. 4), volunteers flocking together to protect coastal birds (pg. 10), and exciting new groundbreakings in the world of Everglades restoration (pg. 8).

However, summer is also a time to reflect on the previous year before diving into fall migration. The Florida Legislative session delivered funding wins for conservation and Everglades restoration, but a blow to smart growth statewide (pg. 6). A new Supreme Court decision will make water protection more difficult (pg. 7).

Your efforts to advocate for birds and the places they need give me a deep sense of hope. Just this year, chapter members in Brevard County worked with the Town of Malabar and other stakeholders to broker a compromise to protect endangered Florida Scrub-Jays (pg. 5). And the next generation of environmental leaders participated in academies in Orlando, Miami, and Tampa as they ready themselves to launch their careers in the environmental field (pg. 15).

Staff, volunteers, members, donors, and supporters give our work wings at Audubon. Read on for exciting updates from across the Florida flock!

Heidi McCree, *Chair, Audubon Florida*



Julie Wraithmell, Executive Director

For me, the return to warmer temperatures and summer skies is heralded by the Mississippi Kite. Like the end of the Florida Legislative Session and ramping up of beach-nesting bird season, this special raptor tells me that summer is upon us.

Mississippi Kites spend the winter in South America before breeding in portions of the southeastern U.S. and Florida Panhandle. Like all migratory birds, their flight paths connect us across borders, as well as across time and space. Raptors are on the move, but so are songbirds and shorebirds, waders, and waterfowl. In May an American Redstart flew past the Motus station at our own Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, connecting Jamaica, where it was originally tagged, with Florida and then on to its nesting habitat in the Midwest.

Our Audubon staff are on the move too. From crisscrossing Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary as we hosted scientists and policymakers, to the coastal team fanning out across 300+ nesting sites, to the Everglades team representing birds at critical groundbreakings and ribbon cuttings, we spend the hottest months in every kind of Sunshine State habitat.

Julie Wraithmell, *Executive Director, Audubon Florida*

2023 Florida Audubon Society Leadership

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Ron Magill

Steve Nellis

Lauren Sher

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We have more work ahead of us. Are you receiving our digital updates? If not, tune in for special updates from the Audubon team: fl.audubon.org/keep-touch



2023
**Audubon
Assembly**

**Conservation in a
Changing Landscape**

Registration is open for
Audubon Assembly 2023!

OCTOBER 26-28

The 2023 Assembly will be held in person at the Sheraton Tampa Brandon hotel. With learning sessions, a keynote presentation, awards, and field trips to some of the birdiest hotspots in the Tampa Bay region, Assembly is a great opportunity to network with Audubon members, staff, and volunteers across the state.

Tickets: \$155

Early Bird Tickets: \$135

Friday Night Banquet Only: \$80

Roseate Spoonbill.

Photo: Niccole Neely/Audubon Photography Awards

**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 on Saturday, October 28, 2023. 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.



◀ Jacksonville leads Northeast Florida in planning for a changing climate.

Resilience Planning Charts a Course for Northeast Florida

Northeast Floridians are taking major steps forward to make their communities more resilient to flooding, heat, wind, and wildfire. Audubon's Northeast Florida Policy Associate Chris Farrell works closely with two efforts that will shape the future of this region.

The Goal: Resiliency efforts will consider the interconnectedness of nature and the built environment and take a broad, science-based, data-driven approach to be effective, sustainable, and equitable.

JACKSONVILLE:

Parks, Open Space, and Ecology Working Group

The City of Jacksonville assessed the vulnerabilities of Jacksonville's people, infrastructure, and economy as a first step in future scenario planning. Farrell collaborates with the Parks, Open Space, and Ecology Working Group as they explore the connections between green space and resilience. Green infrastructure and nature-based solutions reduce the impacts of climate change and other threats, while also providing co-benefits such as improved air and water quality, enhanced biodiversity, and opportunities for recreation and education. These will undoubtedly be important components of the final plan.

NORTHEAST FLORIDA REGIONAL COUNCIL:

Environment Committee of the Resilient First Coast Collaborative

This effort actively promotes regional cooperation on initiatives that improve the environment, quality of life, infrastructure, and economic resilience of Northeast Florida. The collaborative develops information and tools that municipalities can use to adapt and thrive in the face of natural disasters and chronic stresses related to climate change.

Farrell's involvement in these resilience planning efforts is a critical part of Audubon Florida's work in Northeast Florida. By promoting green infrastructure and nature-based solutions, and by advocating for policies and investments that enhance resilience, Farrell ensures that Jacksonville and the broader Northeast Florida region are prepared to face the challenges of a changing climate.



Black-crowned Night-Heron.
Photo: Frank Hildebrand/
Audubon Photography Awards.



HALIFAX RIVER AUDUBON TURNS 100
 Congratulations to Halifax River Audubon for protecting birds and the places they need for 100 years! The organization celebrated at an event at the Cici and Hyatt Brown Museum of Arts and Science, along with members of the other two Volusia County-based Audubon chapters, Southeast Volusia and West Volusia.



From left to right: Ed Sherman, Arnette Sherman (President of West Volusia Audubon), Jacqui Sulek (Audubon Florida), Dennise Hartgrove, David Hartgrove (outgoing President of Halifax River Audubon), and Marsha and Bill Cox (Co-Presidents of Southeast Volusia Audubon).

Florida Scrub-Jay Advocates Defend Restoration Plans in Brevard County

In Brevard County, a group of recreational mountain bikers opposed the much-needed ecological restoration of Malabar Scrub Sanctuary. Restoration is a matter of survival for this area’s scrub-jays, and Brevard County Jay Watcher and Space Coast Audubon member Vince Lamb rallied advocates to lend jays their voices at the Brevard County Commission meeting in early May.

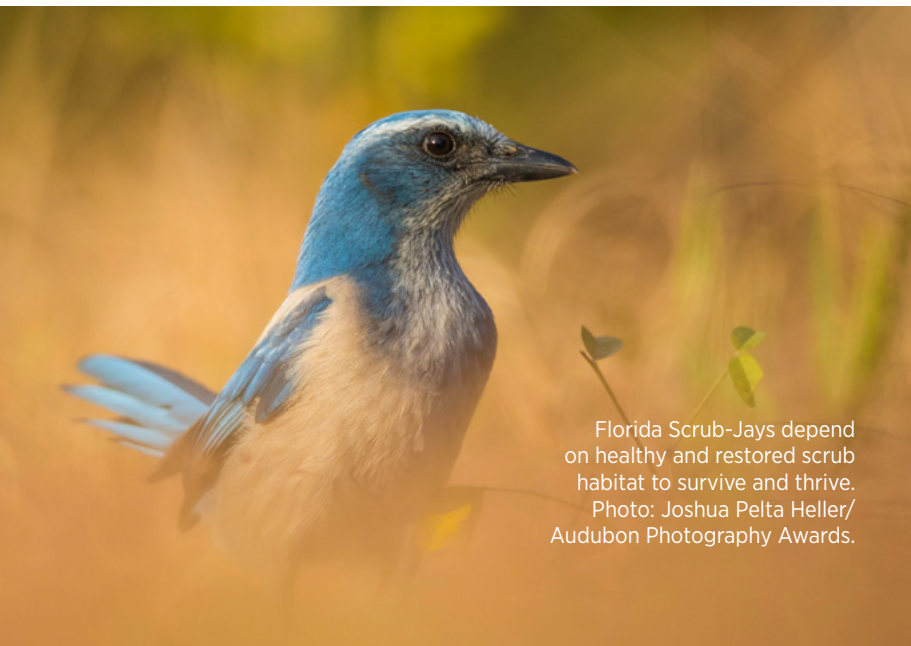
Florida Scrub-Jays have evolved to live in Florida scrub habitat, which historically burned every few years as a result of lightning and people-ignited fires. This frequent fire renews the jays’ habitat, ensuring the open sandy patches they depend upon remain clear and canopy trees do not encroach upon the area, making it inviable for the jays. With the development of Florida, roads and other converted areas interrupted the ability of fire to sweep across the landscape. Where fire does ignite naturally, humans quickly extinguish it for the safety of our communities.

Many of the remaining scrub tracts have become overgrown, resulting in a cruel irony: Even if they are protected from development as parks or preserves, the jays cannot thrive on them. Without proper maintenance, the abundance of fuel makes these areas a greater wildfire risk to human neighbors and also puts the birds at risk of predation by hawks.

Audubon Florida and Space Coast Audubon submitted a letter in support of Brevard County’s Environmentally Endangered Lands (EEL) program staff in their efforts to restore open habitat the jays need at the Sanctuary using both mechanical tree removal and prescribed fire. Space Coast Audubon and Audubon Florida members attended additional public meetings to speak and be a presence for the birds.

At a Town Council meeting in May, the groups reached a compromise: the EEL program will relocate the bike trails to the perimeter of the property where shade trees will remain, while the interior of the Sanctuary will be restored and managed for the jays.

Thank you to Vince Lamb and those who acted in defense of this vulnerable species. With the continued advocacy of Vince and his fellow Brevard County Jay Watchers, we are hopeful the sanctuary’s restoration will begin soon.



Florida Scrub-Jays depend on healthy and restored scrub habitat to survive and thrive.
 Photo: Joshua Pelta Heller/
 Audubon Photography Awards.

Florida Legislative Session Returns Funding Wins for Everglades Restoration and Land Acquisition, but Negative Impacts on Smart Growth

A busy and somewhat unusual Florida Legislative Session concluded in May. Audubon's policy team pounded the pavement in Tallahassee to push good bills forward, to stop bad bills in their tracks, and to encourage full funding of environmental programs, conservation, and restoration.

SPRAWL:

Reducing local government home rule proved to be a theme of this session. As a conservation organization, we care that cities and counties have the power to protect and preserve special places within their borders. In Florida, we have a long history of state laws being the floor of such protections, but cities and counties need the additional ability to be more protective than the state. Only they can make decisions that take into account special features or conditions within their communities to contend with issues that may not appear in other counties across our large state.

BUDGET:

House and Senate leaders voted on the state's spending plan for fiscal year 2023-2024, totaling \$116.5 billion, the largest in state history.

Highlights include more than \$1.6 billion for water and Everglades restoration as well as over \$1 billion for land acquisition programs.

Of note, in addition to \$100 million for the Florida Forever program, an \$850 million appropriation appeared in the budget late in the session. These funds are earmarked for habitat conservation in Northeast Florida (the "Ocala to Osceola Corridor" or "O2O") and Southwest Florida (the "Caloosahatchee-Big Cypress Basin").

The O2O acquisitions are already identified through the Florida Forever program as a priority for purchase for conservation and include parcels in Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Clay, Columbia, Duval, Hamilton, Lake, Marion, Putnam, Union, and Volusia counties.

The Caloosahatchee-Big Cypress Land Acquisition project in Hendry and Collier counties will protect and preserve approximately 72,000 acres of conservation and agriculture land and includes an option for easement sellers to lease back acreage for a limited time. Lease terms that are favorable for conservation will be key and remain to be negotiated between sellers and the state. Both of these projects would provide critical linkages for wildlife, recreational opportunities for people, and benefits for water quality and carbon sequestration.

This is the largest appropriation for land conservation in Florida history and presents a remarkable opportunity for progress in these two regions of the state. While these acquisitions may be outside the Florida Forever program, it will be important that the transparency and accountability Floridians have come to expect from conservation land buying are applied to these projects, as well.



While the session ended with substantial funding for Everglades restoration and land acquisition, Audubon remains concerned about the negative impacts on smart growth statewide. Sandhill Crane. Photo: Frances Gaines/Audubon Photography Awards.



◀ A Supreme Court decision could have major impacts on how waterways are protected in Florida. Audubon continues to work with elected and agency officials across levels of government to protect birds and the places they need. Photo: Roberta Blair/Great Backyard Bird Count.

Supreme Court Decision Threatens Waterways that Birds (and People) Need

In a May ruling, the United States Supreme Court curtailed the ability of the Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Army Corps of Engineers to regulate the “Waters of the United States.” While the Clean Water Act includes regulatory definitions for most large bodies of water and rivers, smaller waterways which may be seasonal or disconnected are not as clearly defined. This ruling limits the ability of the agencies to permit activities on many of these smaller waterways and means that unregulated development can occur in many of these areas.

With the loss of three billion birds in the past 50 years—in part due to dwindling wetlands and significant development of natural spaces—and Audubon science showing that two-thirds of North American bird species are at risk of extinction from climate change, action is needed to protect the water bodies and habitat that birds need to survive. Waters around the nation, such as seasonal streams and isolated wetlands, serve as essential habitat for birds and other wildlife. These water bodies provide crucial sources of drinking water, food, and nutrition for birds. Birds also use lakes, streams, and wetlands for breeding and nesting, as well as for rest stops during long migratory journeys.

Wetlands and seasonal streams provide more than just critical bird habitat—they also serve people as nature’s filters to clean our drinking water and protect us from storms, floods, and other climatic stressors. Too many low-income communities, Tribal communities, and communities of color do not have consistent access to safe, affordable drinking water and strong protections under the Clean Water Act are needed to support these communities.

Florida Continues to Add to Conservation Lands

In May, the Florida Cabinet approved a monumental slate of land purchases.

“Audubon Florida celebrates the Cabinet’s protection of more than 60 square miles of habitat critical to wildlife, water quality, and local communities. In Florida, our environment is the foundation for our economy, so these acquisitions and easements will safeguard the prosperity and quality of life for all Floridians. These additions stretch from the Panhandle to the Northern Everglades, and this is a great day for Swallow-tailed Kites, Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Crested Caracaras, Florida panthers, and so much more.”
— Julie Wraithmell, Executive Director of Audubon Florida

Everglades Restoration Projects Improve Water Quality and Quantity in the River of Grass

Audubon staff travel across South Florida to represent birds and the places they need as Everglades restoration initiatives come online. In May alone, we were on hand for both a groundbreaking and a ribbon cutting, representing the start and end of two important restoration projects. Audubon has studied and advocated for the Everglades for 123 years, and we are thrilled to see decades of planning and advocacy come to fruition.

MORE WATER FLOWS THROUGH TAYLOR SLOUGH INTO FLORIDA BAY

We celebrated the ribbon cutting for the Taylor Slough Improvement Project just four months after standing in the same spot with shovels to kickstart the initiative's groundbreaking. To see a step forward in Everglades restoration go from start to finish in record time is a testament to the collaboration among many partners that has been cultivated over the years to restore America's Everglades. Located within Everglades National Park, the improvement project was completed so quickly thanks to both the South Florida Water Management District team and the Army Corps of Engineers.

The Taylor Slough Flow Improvement Project will restore freshwater flows to Florida Bay. Located on the east side of the southern Everglades, Taylor Slough is one of two major

freshwater sloughs in Everglades National Park. Due to both the infrastructure of the Central and Southern Florida System and the construction of Old Ingraham Highway, the latter of which inadvertently acted as a dam, water flow to Taylor Slough was cut off significantly. The project restores water connectivity through the installation of 18 culverts in nine different locations along Ingraham Highway and plugs several canals that had diverted water from the slough. These steps will redirect fresh water to its rightful path while also restoring natural plant communities in the area.

At Audubon, we have protected iconic bird species while studying the health of the Everglades—especially Taylor Slough—for almost 100 years. Jerry Lorenz, PhD, State Research Director, has been the scientific force behind this work for more than three decades. Because of our longstanding history here on Florida Bay, we know that the additional connectivity into Taylor Slough from this project will improve water conditions in this area and support habitat and wildlife. We look forward to continuing to monitor Taylor Slough and sharing the results of this project as the benefits are realized.

CENTRAL EVERGLADES PLANNING PROJECT - NORTH PHASE

The South Florida Water Management District and the Army Corps of Engineers hosted a celebratory groundbreaking for the Central Everglades Planning Project (CEPP) North Phase component. This initiative improves clean water flows and enhances the timing and distribution of water to the central Everglades and the Water Conservation Areas. It will also transport more water south to the Everglades and Florida Bay while replenishing our aquifers in South Florida. All four phases of CEPP are now under construction—an exciting milestone! CEPP North will be composed of seven structures, including a canal, as well as improvements to 18 miles of canals currently in operation. Audubon staff attended the event, which took place on the border between Broward and Palm Beach counties.



Culverts along the Ingraham Highway will allow more water to flow south into the Everglades. Photo: SFWMD.



▲ Ribbon cutting in Everglades National Park means more water flowing into Taylor Slough. From left to right: Department of Environmental Protection Secretary Shawn Hamilton, Superintendent of Everglades and Dry Tortugas National Parks Pedro Ramos, and Audubon Florida's Director of Everglades Policy Kelly Cox and Everglades Policy Associate Caitlin Newcamp. Photo: SFWMD.

The Stage is Set for a New Greenhouse Gas Inventory in East Florida

Audubon Florida is setting its sights on the east coast of Florida to launch the third iteration of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Cohorts. Through this program, students from Florida universities team up with staff from city and county governments to create GHG inventories for government operations in order to identify emissions within their departments and facilities.

Greenhouse gases are emitted through fossil fuel burning. When they are released into the atmosphere, they trap heat, driving global climate change. Cities and counties can effectively reduce their emissions and thus their contribution to climate change if they have an inventory of their emissions to get started. With that baseline, they identify opportunities to reduce emissions and take steps toward regional climate action planning.

Through the program, local governments work on the same timeline, creating momentum and collaborating as a region.

Local governments also receive additional capacity from student interns, while the students contribute to meaningful work as they gain real-world experience for academic credit.

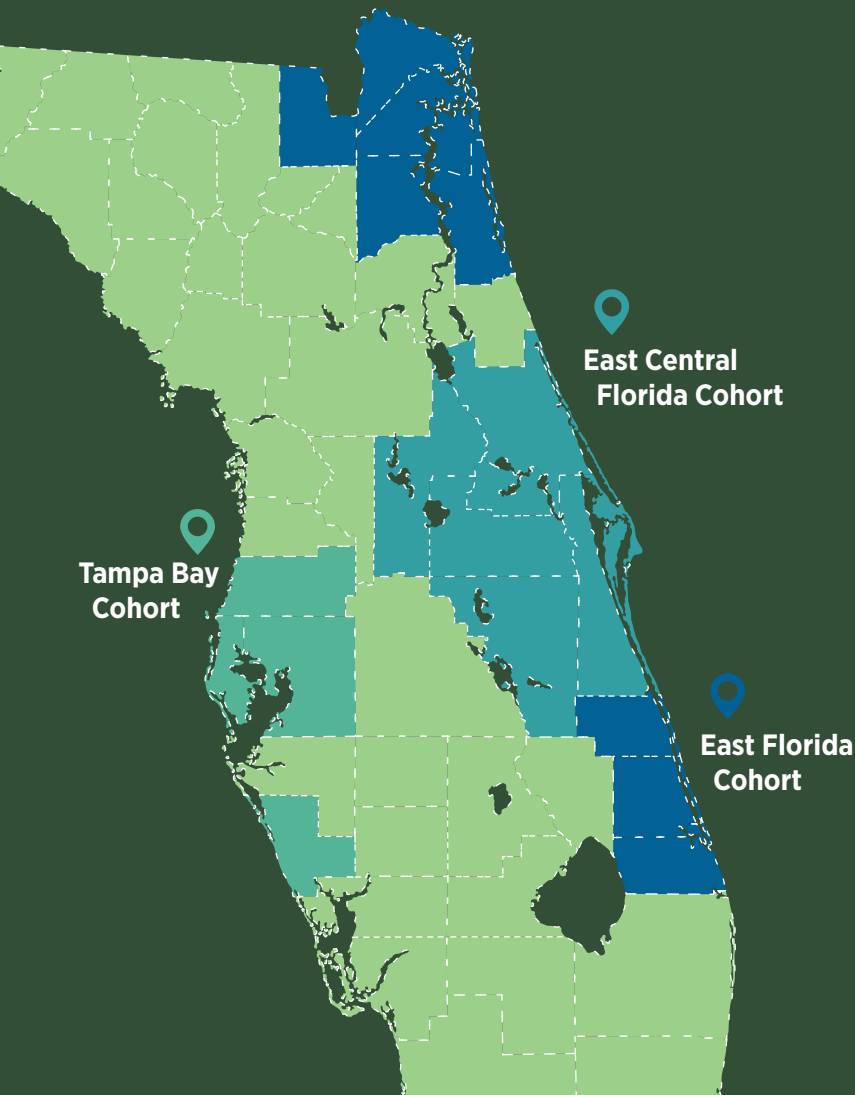
As the East Florida Cohort kicks off in July, local government staff will start meeting with an expert from ICLEI USA, Local Governments for Sustainability, to receive direction and guidance on how to gather data from different departments, including wastewater, solid waste, water, electricity, and more.

Student partners are slated to join the local government staff in Fall. Partner schools include Indian River State College, Florida Institute of Technology, Stetson University, and University of North Florida. As the year progresses, the student and local government pairs will participate in further training facilitated by ICLEI to complete their GHG inventories.

Audubon Florida has previously hosted two other regional GHG Cohorts. In 2021, Audubon Florida launched the state's largest, simultaneous local government operation GHG inventory initiative in East Central Florida. The AF + R2C Cohort was co-facilitated by Audubon Florida, the East Central Florida Regional Resilience Collaborative (R2C), and ICLEI. In this cohort, 18 local governments and 18 students from Stetson University, Florida Institute of Technology, and University of Central Florida were paired to complete a GHG inventory. The project team replicated the cohort in the Tampa Bay region in 2022 with 12 local governments and students from University of South Florida.

Audubon Florida continues to work with our cohort alumni to identify ongoing ways to collaborate as next steps in climate action planning are identified and developed.

This year's program would not be possible without the funding and support from our corporate partner, Wells Fargo.



Volunteer Flock Protects Sea and Shorebirds During Busy Nesting Season

Across Florida beaches, bays, and barrier islands, our volunteer flock works with Audubon's coastal team to protect beach-nesting sea and shorebirds. During the spring and summer nesting season, they combine an array of talents to make the Sunshine State safer for birds.

BIRD STEWARDS

Have you seen volunteers on the sand wearing "Ask Me About the Birds" t-shirts? They are our bird stewards! They engage directly with beachgoers, explaining the wonders of the nesting season to locals and visitors alike. Their efforts reduce human disturbance in nesting colonies, and they alert Audubon staff to predation problems.

BUILDING DECOYS

Beth Reynolds taught herself to use woodworking tools to make Least Tern decoys for Rooftop Biologist Kara Cook. The decoys are placed on rooftops suitable for seabird nesting to alert the incoming birds that the habitat is safe. "I thought well, it looks like a crafty project," Beth said. "I'll figure it out."

POSTING

Birds often choose the same nesting location year after year, and each summer Audubon volunteers are there to post signs and flagging to keep people at a safe distance from nesting birds. Posted areas are critical communication and protection tools to educate those less familiar with Florida's beach-nesting bird species about the importance of keeping them safe.

ROOFTOP NESTING

What happens when a chick at a rooftop nesting site falls to the ground below? Audubon volunteers carefully retrieve and replace them using a chick-a-boom! Rooftop monitoring volunteers are a critical component of successful rooftop colony sites, and we depend on their eyes and ears to protect this unique habitat.

PROTECTING BEACHES

When a dog beach was proposed on Sarasota's Lido Key—where birds already struggle to find good nesting habitat—Audubon staff and volunteers jumped into action. Shorebird volunteers identified the threat of a proposed dog beach and mobilized to testify, convincing the county commission to look elsewhere for the project. Because of their efforts, Black Skimmers, Least Terns, and Snowy Plovers can flock to Lido Key beaches this summer.



USGS partners and volunteers at a preseason posting session at Cape San Blas. Photo: Dan Catizone/USGS.



Least Tern decoys. Photo: Beth Reynolds



Least Terns on Lido Key. Photo: Kylie Wilson/Audubon Florida.

USING YOUR VOICE

More than 2,000 Audubon advocates asked the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to improve fishing regulations at the Skyway Pier to protect Brown Pelicans and other nesting birds in Tampa Bay from entanglement. Another 700+ wrote to elected officials in the Florida State Legislature to ask for improved stormwater rules that will reduce the scourge of algal blooms along our shores.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Jean Hall is passionate about photography. She travels the world taking beautiful images of wildlife, and when at home in Southwest Florida pays special attention to our native species. Her images and reports have accompanied conservation messaging across the country on social media, in news articles, across Audubon publications, and more! We rely on photographs from our volunteers to protect places for birds, as well as for the identification and recording of banded birds using our shores.

Our photographers follow wildlife photography ethical guidelines.

Learn more at:

fl.audubon.org/birds/wildlife-photography-ethics





Photo: Jessica Dickson.

Osceola County Provides Window into Bald Eagle Nesting in Florida and Importance of EagleWatch and Raptor Clinic

If you live in Osceola County, you live near Bald Eagles. These iconic raptors raised chicks in dozens of known nests during the 2022-2023 breeding season. Their success here is a testament to the increase in Florida’s Bald Eagle population—from around 300 nests when the species was first listed as Endangered in 1978 to more than 1,500 nests today—but remains emblematic of the threats these birds face now and into the future.

OSCEOLA COUNTY

The population in Osceola County is growing—that’s true whether you’re referring to eagles or humans. As one of the state’s fastest growing counties, Osceola is under constant pressure to keep up with the housing needs of the population. At the same time, the undeveloped regions of the county are home to dozens of Bald Eagles. More than 90 Bald Eagle pairs made their nests in Osceola County in 2023, monitored by 19 EagleWatch volunteers. They lose important habitat every year while navigating impacts from climate change, poisonings, and vehicle strikes. As a result, the eagles are nesting closer to each other, with fewer resources to split among them.

“Bald Eagles in Osceola County are now nesting within half a mile of each other,” explains Shawnlei Breeding, EagleWatch Program Manager. “In other areas of the state, they give each other a mile of space.”

AN EAGLE HABITAT CRISIS

The Audubon Center for Birds of Prey’s Raptor Trauma Clinic sees the effects of this eagle habitat crisis. Earlier this year, an injured eagle arrived in the clinic after it was found in a lake—its wounds were

consistent with a territory fight. Around the same time, the Clinic treated two eagles that had been victims of separate vehicle strikes. As the eagle population in the county is pushed closer together, and closer to human development, these incidences increase.

While development can be disastrous for birds, Osceola County has thousands of acres of protected land that are home to many species of wildlife. According to Center for Birds of Prey rescue volunteer Cheryl Merz, Joe Overstreet Landing and Three Lakes Wildlife Management Area are two locations where eagles flourish, and she and the rescue team frequently choose to release rehabilitated eagles there. Eaglets that are rehabilitated at the Center for Birds of Prey do not learn hunting and survival skills from their parents, so releasing them near other adults gives them a better chance of catching up on these crucial skills.

EAGLEWATCH VOLUNTEERS ARE EYES AND EARS FOR BIRDS OF PREY

EagleWatch volunteers monitor Bald Eagle nests every season to track nest locations and fledgling success as well as to alert law enforcement, utility companies, and other stakeholders when problems arise.

This year alone, four injured Bald Eagles from Osceola County have been rescued by EagleWatch volunteers.

INTO THE FUTURE

Using EagleWatch data and observations, Audubon advocates for protective policies for eagles and land acquisition for conservation. The Raptor Trauma Clinic continues to treat, rehabilitate, and release injured Bald Eagles, while the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey links people and birds by providing a place for the local community to learn more about conservation and the raptors that call the Sunshine State home.

VISIT THE AUDUBON CENTER FOR BIRDS OF PREY:
cbop.audubon.org

LEARN MORE ABOUT EAGLEWATCH AND
EAGLE NESTS IN YOUR AREA:
cbop.audubon.org/eaglewatch

SUPPORT FLORIDA RAPTORS:
cbop.audubon.org/support-raptors

Photo: Bob Glover



Have You Included Audubon in Your Estate Plans?

To keep protecting Florida's iconic birds and habitats for decades to come, Audubon Florida launched *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 \$10 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.

Looking for Ways to Double Your Impact in 2023?

If you are 70½ or older, you can make a tax-free distribution from your **traditional or Roth IRA** to Audubon Florida.

Here's how it works: you donate up to \$100,000 without incurring income tax on your withdrawal. The process is simple: you direct distributions in the amount of your choosing from your traditional or Roth IRA to Audubon Florida. This can be a one-time or recurring gift. The distributions go directly to Audubon Florida and are not subject to federal income tax.

When making your gift, to ensure it is properly processed and that you are listed as the donor of record and the gift comes to Florida, please have all checks directed to the address below and contact Suzanne Bartlett at 305.371.6399, ext. 123 or Suzanne.Bartlett@audubon.org to let us know to expect your gift.

**National Audubon Society
Office of Gift Planning
225 Varick Street, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10014**

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:
305.371.6399, ext. 123
Suzanne.Bartlett@audubon.org
Or fill out this form:
audubon.planyourlegacy.org/societyform.php**



Prothonotary Warbler.
Photo: Joe Gliozzo/Audubon Photography Awards.

Introducing New Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary Director

Keith Laakkonen joined the Audubon team in January. As Sanctuary Director, Laakkonen oversees the management of the 13,450-acre Sanctuary and its 25 full- and part-time staff responsible for habitat stewardship, research, policy, and public engagement.

Laakkonen is a Southwest Florida native with more than 20 years of environmental management experience as a public servant. He most recently worked for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection as regional administrator for the Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection.

“I am grateful to the amazing volunteers and supporters who dedicate their time and treasure to help us conduct our science and education work, which is so important for Southwest Florida. Additionally, we have some big plans to elevate our work in a really significant way in the coming years, and I’m thrilled to be part of this transformational time for the Sanctuary.”

— Keith Laakkonen, Sanctuary Director



Laakkonen is also an avid birder and considers this to be his dream job. Welcome, Keith!

VISIT THE SANCTUARY

Visit Audubon’s Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary this summer! Open daily with a variety of activities, join us bright and early for an Early Birding Walk or be a night owl on a Sunset Stroll or Night Walk. From the Corkscrew Hammock Day celebration on July 21 (we provide the hammocks) to a magical evening at the Moonlight on the Boardwalk event on August 1, explore the 2.25-mile boardwalk that serves as the gateway to an enchanting wilderness, with giant cypress trees more than 500 years old.

Florida residents receive discounted daily admission for the months of August and September!

Visit corkscrew.audubon.org for details and our schedule of events.

Sharing Wetland Restoration Best Practices

Over the past six months, Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary has hosted site visits with organizational partners as part of a collaborative effort to address wetland loss and degradation across our state.

Audubon staff excitedly welcomed members of the St. John’s River Water Management District to share best practices and discuss Carolina willow control and wetland restoration. Their team has tackled willow control in Northeast Florida for many years and they were very impressed with our work in the Sanctuary thus far.

A tour with Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) focused conversations on Audubon’s work to refine restoration methods for maximum restoration benefits while minimizing disturbance at the site. DEP staff members proposed using our restoration as a model to develop guidance and best practices for other landowners seeking to restore ecological benefits to wetlands that have been altered by willow on their properties.

Also visiting this spring were South Florida Water Management District and Big Cypress Basin officials. As the group toured the boardwalk, they were briefed on several key Audubon policy objectives, including restoration, watershed protection and management work, wetland regulatory reforms needed, and the roles that inland wetland restoration and protection play in climate resilience.



Photo: Charlie McDonald Photography.





CLI Academies Connect the Next Generation of Conservation Leaders

This spring, Audubon broadened its reach to the next generation of environmental leaders through a series of Conservation Leadership Academies. An extension of Audubon Florida's year-long program, the Conservation Leadership Initiative (CLI), the academies brought together our CLI alumni network and current CLI class to host single-day outreach events to connect with college students across Florida. Academies became a recurring part of the program this year.

Conservation Leadership Academies share similar goals to the larger CLI program: connecting college students to Audubon initiatives and their local chapters while creating networking opportunities with both student peers and local conservation professionals.

This year, CLI hosted academies in the Orlando, Miami, and Tampa Bay regions. Each event included an introduction to Audubon session, an immersive field trip in a local nature preserve, and a conservation career panel.

The career panel, one of the most popular components of the academies, invited students to speak to local conservation professionals in an intimate setting, providing insight into networking, job paths, grad school options, and what day-to-day life is like in the environmental field. Panelists included state and federal agency employees, such as the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and Department of the

Students explored Wekiwa Springs State Park as part of the Orlando Academy field trip. 

Interior; private entities, such as Coca-Cola Florida's Sustainability team and environmental consultants; and Audubon Florida's very own Holley Short, Shorebird Program Manager on our Coastal Team.

ORLANDO

The Orlando Academy was hosted at Wekiwa Springs State Park, which also served as the field trip location. Participants learned about local wildlife and how the park manages conservation and restoration across its varying ecosystems. A special guest, Seminole County Commissioner Lee Constantine, made an appearance and shared his reflections on advocating for the local environment throughout his career.

MIAMI

After hearing about Audubon's work at the national, state, and local chapter levels from National Board Member Steffanie Munguía, students set off on a field trip to explore Deering Estate's natural areas hosted by their estate naturalists. We extend a big "thank you" to our Miami session sponsor, Coke Florida!

TAMPA BAY

A favorite local birding spot in St. Petersburg, Boyd Hill Nature Preserve, served as the location for our Tampa Bay Academy. Preserve educators led a tour across several of the preserve's ecosystems and provided a visit to their raptor center to meet a resident Eastern Screech-Owl.

Want to know more about conservation in Florida?

Attend the Audubon Assembly in Tampa Bay, October 26-28 (pg. 3).
Make plans now! Learn more at: fl.audubon.org/assembly



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▶ Spotted! A pair of American Oystercatchers nests on a busy beach in Fort De Soto County Park. Remember to give birds their space this summer as they raise fuzzy chicks right on the sand. Photo: Abby McKay/Audubon Florida.

 **Audubon** | FLORIDA

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