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Florida Naturalist



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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Solving today's environmental challenges is complex. We must find a balance between the pressures of explosive growth and the need for environmental sustainability. We must restore unique ecosystems and habitats that birds and wildlife depend upon. And we must acquire natural areas to ensure their protection in perpetuity.



"Restoration and protection of Everglades ecosystems would not be possible without the strong support of Audubon of Florida. You really have done a lot of good work on the Lake," said Senator Bob Smith, president of the Everglades Foundation (right), pictured with David Anderson.

Audubon of Florida could not address these challenges without support from and the work of our strategic partners. In February, I was pleased to present Senator Bob Smith, President of the Everglades Foundation, with the fruit of an important labor, the Lake Okeechobee Report. The Report, like many of our accomplishments in restoring the Everglades, is possible because of funding from the Everglades Foundation. Support also came from a variety of foundations, in particular, the Batchelor Foundation, which has been most generous in recent years.

The Lake Okeechobee Report is an in-depth, scientific assessment of this crucial ecosystem, researched and written by Dr. Paul Gray, Chris Farrell, Dr. Mark Kraus and April Gromnicki. It examines the Lake's natural resources, water level management, water quality and exotic species, and it makes specific recommendations

for its restoration. We deeply appreciate the Everglades Foundation's support of this major contribution to the health of this critically threatened Lake.

Audubon of Florida, since the early 1990s, has enjoyed a long and productive relationship with the founders of the Everglades Foundation. Back then, Paul Tudor Jones and George and Mary Barley were instrumental in helping us establish the first Audubon Everglades Office in Miami. Other key supporters were Bill Riley and Nathaniel Reed.

The steadfast support, advice and encouragement from these individuals, and the support of the Everglades Foundation, have enabled Audubon of Florida and its environmental partners to develop strong science and advocacy to restore Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades. Significantly, sound science and powerful advocacy were keys to ensuring the conception, development and passage of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) and other initiatives within the Everglades ecosystem. Science and advocacy will continue to be a recipe for successful implementation of these plans.

We thank the Everglades Foundation and the individuals who are a part of it for their consistent commitment to conservation and for supporting Audubon of Florida and its strategic partners. Challenges still exist, but working together, we will continue to be effective in restoring ecosystems and protecting birds and wildlife.

David E. Anderson
Executive Director, Audubon of Florida



Birdhouses painted and donated to the fundraising auction included these by (left to right) writer Carl Hiaasen, artist Janet Costin, and actors Susan Sarandon and Larry Hagman.

Florida artists and celebrities help make Tampa Audubon Society's “Flock Around the Dock” a fly-away success

In May 2005, Tampa Audubon Society gained a new level of recognition with “Flock Around the Dock.” The event netted just over \$14,000 to become the chapter's most successful fundraiser to date. Proceeds are being used to support the Hillsborough River Greenways Task Force, the Audubon Resource Center at Lettuce Lake Park, Audubon of Florida's Coastal Islands Sanctuaries, and the chapter itself.

Six months in advance, chapter members began inviting Florida artists and celebrities to decorate bird houses to be auctioned at fundraiser. To ensure a good response, they provided already-sanded and primed bird houses, plus paints and brushes. Nearly 40 artists submitted finished works that ranged from the whimsical to traditional wildlife art. Leonardo DiCaprio, Susan Sarandon, Larry Hagman, and Carl Hiaasen were among the celebrities who participated.

The decorated bird houses were exhibited around town in museum-style display cases, building awareness for the auction and for Tampa Audubon. Venues included the USF Botanical Gardens, Tampa Bay Film Festival, TECO Plaza in downtown Tampa, the Florida Aquarium, and Hoffman-Porges Gallery in Ybor City. Tens of thousands of shoppers saw them at International Plaza. Photos of the bird houses were posted on the chapter's Web site tampaaudubon.com, where visitors placed on-line bids. “This created a bidding frenzy for some pieces even before the event itself,” said Stan Kroh, Chapter president. Regional and local magazine, newspapers, TV and radio stations all featured the novel fundraising initiative.

“This publicity helped get the Tampa Audubon name out in the community in a way that had never been done before,” Kroh said. The advance buzz attracted some outstanding professionals to volunteer their services, including Mary Kelley Hoppe of MKH Communications, charity event organizer Lorrie White, and Debra Shrils of WFLA Channel 8's Daytime show who served as celebrity auctioneer. The bird house auction was supplemented by live and silent auctions of other donated items. Harry Connick, Jr. and Tony Bennett contributed autographed memorabilia for the silent auction.

“Just as important as the money that was raised, was the fact that we got the Tampa Audubon name and mission out in the community in a high profile way,” said Kroh. “We also attracted some new corporate sponsors, new members, new Board members and new partners. One of the most rewarding aspects of the event was that we involved the arts community in a unique partnership.”

“We are now contemplating a juried photography exhibit to coincide with our October program on nature photography. This event will be held at Lettuce Lake Park and will attract a new audience to the Audubon Resource Center (ARC at the Park) where we can promote our education initiatives,” Kroh said.

Seminole Audubon Society adds inland nesting site to Project ColonyWatch



Photo of roseate spoonbill by Mitchell McConnell

Over the past few years, Seminole Audubon Society (SAS) has conducted wading-bird surveys around Jane Isle in Lake Jesup in Central Florida. These efforts have culminated in the inclusion of Jane Isle (also called Bird Island) in Project Colony Watch, Audubon of Florida's statewide wading-bird nesting inventory.

During nesting season (roughly January through June), SAS volunteers conduct monthly flight-line surveys from a boat anchored off the island, which is listed with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission as significant wading bird nesting colony #612110. The largest colony of wading birds in Seminole County, Jane Isle is roughly circular, about a quarter-mile in diameter, and low enough to

sometimes be covered by water. Its relative inaccessibility has made it an important inland roosting and nesting area for many species of wading birds that nest in groups called colonies.

"The increased awareness of Jane Isle as a significant wading bird colony would not have happened without partnerships forged with AOF, property owners, and local businesses and government agencies," said Joan Brown-Bachmeier SAS's conservation chairwoman. "The survey data we gather monthly and send to state and local agencies is now being relied upon in various programs."

The Chapter's work with Project ColonyWatch is a good example of how volunteers can take up the slack by doing data collection

work for short-staffed government agencies. And as coastal development reduces wading bird habitat along Florida's ocean and gulf shorelines, it is more important than ever to increase public awareness and create support for the inland rookery on Jane Isle.

For more about this project, visit www.seminoleaudubon.org, click on Conservation and go to Project ColonyWatch. For information on this season's counts, contact plancorp@bellsouth.net.

For more information about Chapters, visit the individual chapter websites that are linked to www.audubonofflorida.org. Click on Chapters to see contact information for all 43 affiliates around the state. Most have websites that can be accessed from that page.

Find everything from local calendars of events to newsletters with detailed coverage of activities and conservation issues. Or contact Audubon of Florida's Chapter Coordinator, Jacqui Sulek, at jsulek@audubon.org.

AOF Welcomes Hendry-Glades Audubon Society as its 43rd Chapter

Hendry-Glades Audubon Society, founded by Glades County resident Phil Fenner, became Audubon of Florida's forty-third on January 13, 2006. Dr. Marty Valient and Janet Falk represented the new chapter at the AOF board meeting held at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. There they received an inscribed copy of "Sibley's Guide to Birds" to add to the chapter's growing library of bird and nature books. Audubon members and guests are welcome at meetings held every second Monday, September through May, at 7 p.m. at the Dallas Townsend Building in LaBelle. For information about meeting programs and free birding tours to STA 5 south of Clewiston, visit the chapter website at www.orgsites.com/fl/hgaudubon/ or call Steve Buczynsik at 863-902-0856.

Orange Audubon Society Nature Photo Contest Goes Digital

"Florida - Wild & Wonderful" is the theme of Orange Audubon Society's 18th Annual Kit & Sidney Chertok Open Nature Photography Contest. Dedicated to preserving Florida's native fauna and flora while encouraging nature photography, the contest is limited to native Florida subject matter with no traces of human activity.

The 2006 competition is digital-only and open to all ages. Entrants may convert prints, negatives or transparencies to digital images

using minimal manipulation. Entries must be postmarked May 18, 2006, and photographers may enter up to four images at \$3 each (Audubon members) or \$5 each for others.

"Considering the all-volunteer nature of our organization, it's remarkable that something as labor-intensive as this contest has endured 18 years and gotten better, to boot," said Teresa Williams of Orange Audubon. Ribbons, cash prizes, camera-store gift cards, and a chance to

grace the cover of the chapter's next annual brochure are this year's awards. For applications and contest rules, click on www.orangeaudubonfl.org or contact Teresa Williams at 407-644-0796 or mwilliams@cfl.rr.com.

Manatee County Audubon creates a nature preserve the entire community enjoys



Manatee County Audubon President Tom Heitzman plants native species at Felts Audubon Preserve.

“The chapter has been reinvigorated by its mission as caretaker of nature, while creating an environmental learning center for the people of Manatee County,” said Arelene Flisik, the chapter’s Conservation Chair.

In 2002

Manatee County Audubon (MCA) inherited approximately 30 acres from Otis Felts. The land includes a mini-forested wetland, mesic hammock, a pasture, and two man-made ponds.

MCA partnered with other organizations to get grant funding to create the Felts Audubon Preserve. They commissioned a management plan from Ed Freeman of The Nature Conservancy and, with funds from the Manatee River Garden Club, planted native shrubs and grasses to attract songbirds and butterflies. The Florida Native Plant Society’s Serenoa Chapter helped MCA secure a Tampa Bay Estuary Program Grant to label 73 plant species.

State Department of Environmental Protection and the Southwest Florida Water Management District funds were used to sculpt the cattle pond, create a new ephemeral wetland out of pasture, and plant littoral shelves to prevent exotics from taking root. MCA placed special wood duck nesting boxes, bluebird houses, and purple martin apartments in the preserve, where 125 bird species have been identified.

Visit Felts Audubon Preserve

At the corner of 24th Avenue East and Experimental Farm Road in Palmetto, Felts Preserve is open 9 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. on the first Saturday of each month. Visitors are welcome on second Saturdays (same hours) when volunteers are working in the preserve, and by appointment. Call Manatee County Audubon Society president Tom Heitzman, 941-737-3169, for details.

Collier County Audubon marshals opposition to project that would destroy wood stork habitat

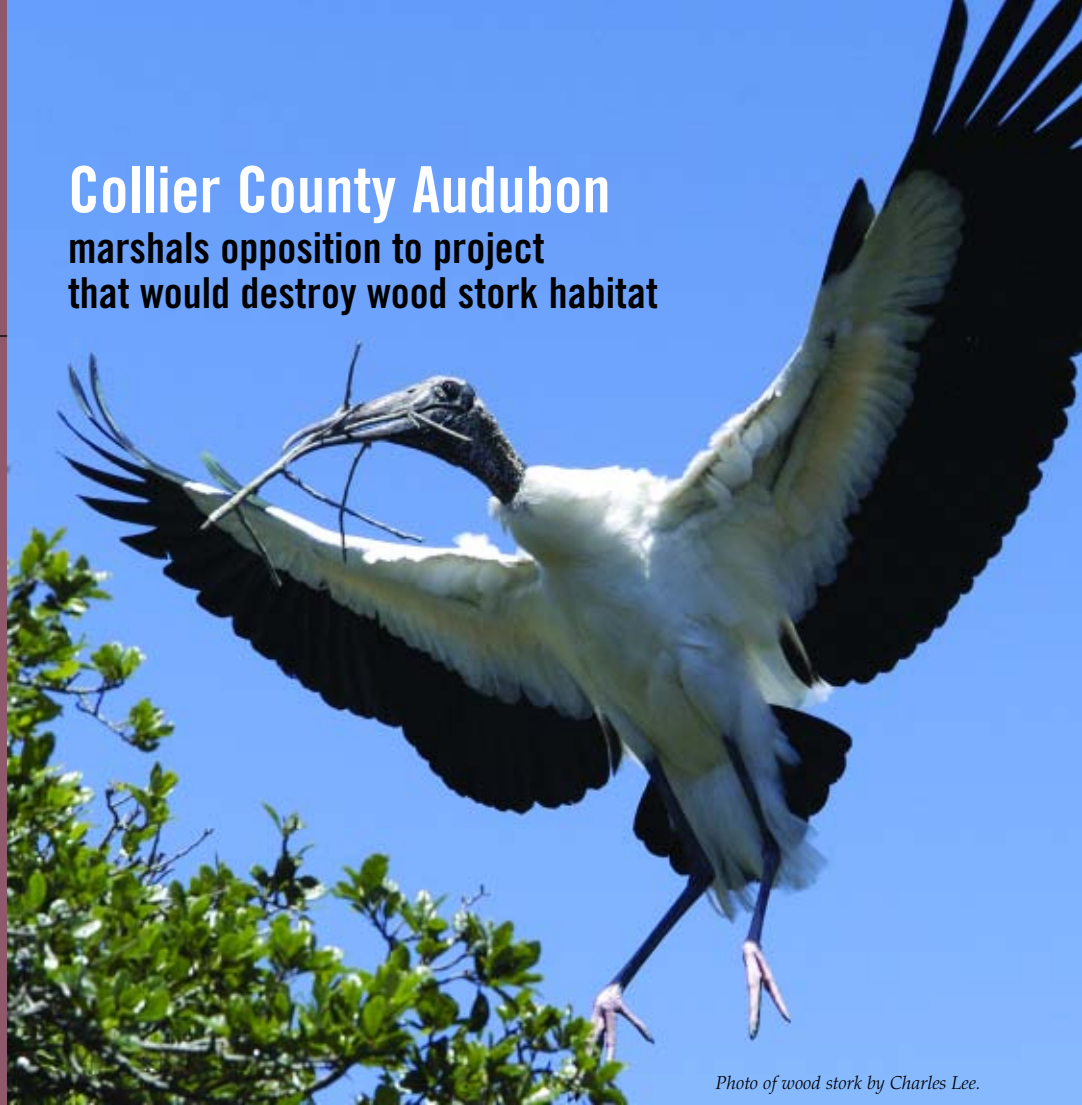


Photo of wood stork by Charles Lee.

Collier County Audubon, together with Audubon of Florida and other environmental partners, continues to protect endangered wood storks and hundreds of acres of their wetland habitat from the pressures of the proposed Mirasol development project.

In February 2006, the developer of Mirasol appealed a landmark decision by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to deny its federal dredge-and-fill permit. The applicant had proposed a golf course residential project near Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, including a ditch that would provide dubious flood control downstream, while radically affecting thousands of acres of wetlands in Cocohatchee Slough.

Anticipating their appeal’s failure, Mirasol and other developers are preparing to apply for modified versions of their state and federal permits, which would concede the ditch but still have an impact on more than a thousand acres of wetlands. Corps review of the appeal could take months, but the applicant has committed to building its golf course in the midst of the slough, one way or another.

Meanwhile, the environmental coalition is working to persuade the South Florida Water Management District (District) to revoke Mirasol’s state permit and start a public process to identify ecologically compatible alternatives. These include:

- buying and restoring remaining wetlands in this slough system
- banking wetlands through private mitigation, and
- completing other flood control actions recommended in 1999 that remain unfinished.

While the District’s governing board has thus far refused to cooperate with these requests, Audubon and its partners will continue to pursue all avenues to achieve true restoration in this critical western Everglades watershed.

Ranches As Habitat — Last Refuges of Important Species

Florida's private lands, including many cattle ranches, provide considerable habitat for birds and other wildlife. With increasing development pressure and rising land prices making public protection of land a less-viable wildlife conservation strategy, ranches remain the last refuge of some important species.

Of Florida's 35 million acres of land, most is in private hands, much of it owned and managed as forests or ranches. Nearly 8 million acres of ranch and timber land are designated as having high wildlife and watershed values, and cattle ranches often retain significant remnants of native plant communities.

Many ranchers have managed family lands well, leaving unimproved pasture that is excellent habitat for grasshopper sparrows and caracaras. Upland sand hills are critical to Florida scrub-jays, and pinelands support red-cockaded woodpeckers. The Florida panther depends on the stewardship of private landowners across much of its South Florida range. Audubon

has long supported ranch conservation, but unchecked growth and recent changes in the farm economy have heightened the need to protect these important habitats.

Audubon of Florida is proud of its role in protecting two of Florida's best known and most bird-friendly ranches: the Adams Ranch and Babcock Ranch. The Adams Ranch (St. Lucie County) is less than ten miles from the urban boundary line and is a favorite destination for birders. The huge Babcock Ranch in Charlotte and Lee counties has been among the state's targeted land-acquisition sites for years, but price has been a problem until now.

Working with investors to create new growth management and financing strategies is one of the ways we are helping to keep Florida a special place for birds and people.

Babcock Ranch

Boasting a vast and diverse stretch of cypress domes, swamps, flat woods and open pasture, Babcock Ranch is a unique environmental treasure—one that would not exist without decades of responsible land management.

One of the state's largest, best-maintained undeveloped tracts of privately-owned land, Babcock Ranch in Southwest Florida has long been a priority purchase under the Florida Forever program. When negotiations for state purchase of the ranch fell apart in spring 2005, the dream of preserving the 91,000-acre ranch seemed dead. But a private partner stepped in, one who shares the community's commitment to preserving as much of the land as possible. The state is now poised to complete the largest preservation purchase in its history.

The proposed state contract will allow permanent preservation of 81 percent of the ranch - nearly 74,000 acres - and will complete a vital link in a preservation corridor stretching from Lake Okeechobee to Charlotte Harbor.

Kitson & Partners, a West Palm Beach-based development company, began negotiations with the state and Charlotte and Lee counties in July, 2005, after contracting to purchase the Babcock Florida Company and all of its assets. The company's plan is based on a belief that preservation and responsible growth can work hand in hand. Preservation of 81 percent of the property becomes economically feasible through creation of a sustainable community on approximately 17,000 acres in the southwest corner of the ranch.

"If we don't want to see Florida's landscape significantly and permanently changed, we must come up with innovative alternatives that protect the land while sustaining growth, because growth is inevitable," said Syd Kitson, chairman and CEO of Kitson & Partners. "I believe the plan we have presented is perhaps the last opportunity to preserve Babcock Ranch, and Audubon of Florida has played an integral role in moving us toward this shared vision."

Early in discussions with the state, Kitson engaged Audubon of Florida and other environmental groups whose vital input led to an unprecedented management plan for the land and helped build support for state purchase. The Peace River Audubon Society engaged in the discussions and continues to advocate for purchase of the 91,000-acre ranch, without the development component.

The current agreement assures continued ranching operations on the property. Cattle ranching and other revenue-generating operations will continue to fund the extensive stewardship activities. These include eradication of non-native plants so that the ranch remains a haven for listed species including the Florida scrub-jay, short-tailed hawk, swallow-tailed kite, sand hill crane, wood stork and red-cockaded woodpecker.

In January, 2006, Governor Jeb Bush released his budget recommendations which included spending \$310 million in general revenue to purchase Babcock Ranch. Lee County will kick in \$40 million to purchase portions of the ranch in Lee County. If approved by the legislature, the entire purchase will be completed without dipping into Florida Forever, reserving those dollars for other priority purchases.

"We would not be where we are today if it weren't for the strong support of the environmental community," Kitson said. "We have seen tremendous leadership and commitment from leaders of groups like Audubon of Florida, who have worked tirelessly to ensure that this environmental treasure remains for future generations to enjoy forever."



Photo by Carlton Ward Jr.

Vanishing Lands, Vanishing Peoples, featuring photographs by Carlton Ward Jr., shares glimpses of places and people in Florida under pressures from development. Images from Adams ranch and other Florida ranches are included in the exhibition, March 10 - April 29, 2006, at Hoffman-Porges Gallery in Ybor City. A portion of the proceeds from print sales will support the conservation efforts of the non-profit Legacy Institute for Nature & Culture (LINC). For details, call 813-247-2000 or click on www.carltonward.com

Adams Ranch

"I think the opportunity to preserve Adams Ranch in a perpetual easement is good for us and good for Florida. This would not have occurred without the help of Audubon." — Bud Adams

The family-owned Adams Ranch has been in continuous operation for almost 70 years. From a tract of grassland purchased in 1937, the ranch has grown to 65,000 acres in four Florida counties. Four generations of the family have worked the ranch. Family ownership has allowed them to manage it as stewards without excessive focus on short-term gain.

Alto "Bud" Adams, Jr. is well known as a leader in conservation practices on the farm, and as a nature photographer. He and his sons have adapted the cattle herds to suit the land, the climate, the insects and the food. They take care to preserve natural cover for wildlife, and it shows.

Oak hammocks on Adams Ranch provide excellent habitat for cattle and wildlife alike. Cattle graze in natural clearings and find shade beneath the trees. Barred owls perch in the live oaks. Large clusters of sable palms dot the landscape, and their berries maintain many birds in winter months.

Wetland areas have been maintained and improved. Wading birds of nearly every species can be seen working their way through wetlands and along pond edges. One distinctive feature of the Adams St. Lucie ranch is the absence of invasive exotic plants such as Brazilian pepper that is ubiquitous throughout South Florida. Ranch managers and cowboys on horseback monitor the arrival of this unwanted vegetation and eradicate it before it becomes a problem.

Open pastures, many of them unimproved, host native grasses and vegetation that support much more than cattle. Crested caracaras often are sighted, perching on fence posts and walking along the ground.

It was this image of a natural Florida ranch that led businessmen Enrique Tomeu, Carlos Vergara and Warren Prescott to found Family Lands Remembered, an organization that facilitates the long-term protection of Adams Ranch. Using a new concept in growth management called Rural Land Stewardship, the group has proposed paying the Adams family to place a conservation easement over as much as 15,000 acres of the St. Lucie ranch in exchange for enhanced development rights on nearby Cloud Grove (now invaded by citrus canker).

The Adams Ranch Stewardship Proposal is now being reviewed by the St. Lucie County Commission and the Florida Department of Community Affairs. The ranch protection plan has been endorsed by Audubon of Florida, which is also advocating for special snail kite habitat restoration on a reservoir located in Cloud Grove.

As the ambitions of Florida Forever and other land-buying programs are trimmed in the face of development pressure and rising land costs, Rural Land Stewardship holds the great promise. Through it, some of Florida's most beautiful, biologically diverse land can be preserved, while maintaining an important part of Florida's historic agricultural economic base.

To that end, Audubon of Florida has proposed variations of the stewardship approach to protect as much as a million acres of habitat.

Green Swamp: Feeling the Heat from Florida's Growth

Sandwiched between Orlando on the east and Tampa on the west, the Green Swamp is one of Florida's last intact wilderness areas.

Green Swamp's approximately 500,000 acres, stand out as one of the few truly intact wilderness areas remaining on Florida's peninsula."

Environmental organizations recognized early the great importance the Green Swamp has to Florida's water resources. The area is the source of four major rivers - the Withlacoochee, the Peace, the Hillsborough, and the Ocklawaha. A matrix of scrub ridges, pine forests, wet prairies, and river floodplains, the swamp has been designated by National Audubon as one of Florida's most prominent "Important Bird Areas" (IBAs).

In 1972, the single most productive year for environmental legislation, aspirations for protection of the Green Swamp figured heavily in lawmakers' decisions. The Legislature acted that year to create an "Area of Critical Concern" program, under which the state would step in to guide land use decisions formerly the sole province of local government. In 1974, the Governor and Cabinet formally designated nearly 300,000 acres of the ecosystem as a Critical Area, and began the process of proposing special regulations to guide development.

About 200,000 acres of the Green Swamp have been permanently protected through the purchase of lands and easements by the Water Management District and State Forest. However, more than half the area remains vulnerable to developer/landowner challenges to regulations, and the ever-intensifying desire of property owners to convert agricultural land and natural areas to subdivisions and shopping centers.

The Area of Critical Concern program encompasses two counties—Lake and Polk—and touches on or includes several municipalities. The Green Swamp's northern edge is subject to the most immediate threats by development. Groveland recently expanded by 79 percent through annexation. The formerly sleepy country town of Mascotte has annexed an additional—39 percent. Communities on the southern end of the swamp are growing at less intense rates: Auburndale—8 percent, Polk City—3 percent, Lakeland—14 percent, and Lake Alfred—2.9 percent.

Signs indicate that growth pressures are ramping up. Unless conservation efforts increase, this wilderness that begins only six miles from Disney World could lose its identity in a sea of subdivisions. Recently the Florida Department of Community Affairs, which administers Area of Critical Concern regulations, challenged a proposal by the City of Groveland and a local development company. Unfortunately, the agency's lawyers were outmaneuvered by those of the



Photo of Green Swamp/Withlacoochee River by Charles Lee.

developers and City. An Administrative Law Judge ruled late in 2005 that a project proposing 532 houses on 264 acres could go forward, changing density in that part of the Green Swamp area from one house per five acres to two houses per acre.

In fall 2005, Groveland's residents voted overwhelmingly to freeze development in the Green Swamp at only one house per five acres, an amendment that didn't come soon enough to stop the Banyan Homes Development. The campaign for the voter approved requirement was spearheaded by Audubon Board member Peggy Cox who also serves as a director of the Orange Audubon Society. Audubon's of Florida's Central Florida Ecosystems efforts target the Green Swamp for major efforts in the next 5 years.

Naturally Central Florida: a New Regional Approach to Preservation

Working with a diverse group of community leaders, Audubon of Florida is taking ecosystem protection in Central Florida to a whole new level.

Nearly two years ago, Audubon and volunteers from Audubon Friends of the Wekiva joined forces with the Orlando Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Metropolitan Center for Regional Studies at the University of Central Florida, the Nature Conservancy and others to collaborate in Myregion, an organization of leaders that is creating a cohesive regional protection plan for seven major ecosystems within seven counties.

Called "Naturally Central Florida," the plan's inventory identifies Central Florida's jewels of the natural world—the Wekiva Ocala Connector, Green Swamp, St. Johns and Econlockhatchee, Greater Kissimmee Prairie, Lake Wales Ridge, Indian River Lagoon and Volusia Conservation Corridor. These ecosystems contain hundreds of thousands of unprotected acres vital for birds, wildlife and water resources in the whole peninsula. Preservation 2000 and Florida Forever state land purchase programs have also invested in land conservation in these regions.

"Naturally Central Florida" was launched in January 2006 at an event hosted by the University of Central Florida and Myregion. More than 300 environmental and community leaders attended. Author and Miami Herald columnist Carl Hiaasen gave the keynote address.

Audubon of Florida presented a concept to create a Regional Land Authority, which would have funding powers and the mission to acquire and preserve natural lands within the crucial ecosystems identified by Naturally Central Florida. It would also provide development rights transfers from crucial natural lands to areas in Central Florida better suited for urban growth. By combining these powers, a Regional Land Authority could harness private dollars to preserve important ecosystems.

Learn more about Naturally Central Florida by visiting www.myregion.org.

Upper Kissimmee Prairie: Preservation Strategies Amid Unprecedented Growth

In the late 1950s and 60s, Florida Audubon Society encouraged ranchers to join a volunteer "Cooperative Bald Eagle Sanctuary" program. Under it, owners placed yellow signs provided by Audubon on their fences and pledged to protect eagle nests on their lands.

In general, the ranchers were good stewards. Nearly 300 active eagle nests now occupy the Upper Kissimmee Chain of Lakes area, a number that matches the entire 1960s eagle population in the lower 48 states. Along with eagles, crested caracaras, sandhill cranes, woodstorks and many other species of wading birds thrive in the upper basin.

But developers' offers of \$20,000 an acre and up for ranchland today are often too lucrative for owners to pass up.

The 15,000 plus acres between West Lake Tohopekaliga and the Florida Turnpike is about to be converted to housing for at least 35,000 new residents, and 5 million square feet of commercial and office development. This rush of urban growth includes five separate "Developments of Regional Impact" (DRIs), and is unprecedented in Central Florida.

Just as the Florida Audubon Society led efforts fifty years ago to conserve the Upper Kissimmee ecosystem, Audubon of Florida is on the move now to deal with development pressures there.

In October 2005, Audubon asked state agency heads and political leaders to intervene. As a result, the Department of Environmental Protection, South Florida Water Management District, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Department of Community Affairs and Army Corps of Engineers have initiated a joint review effort of the major DRIs. Through a process managed by the East Central Florida Regional Planning Council, Osceola County and the developers will be required to assure that the cumulative impacts of all five projects are comprehensively reviewed.

There are already promising signs that innovative designs will emerge, committing 50 percent or more of the land in the development projects to wetland and upland conservation, and water storage.

Audubon of Florida also succeeded in inserting an innovative proposal in Osceola County's comprehensive plan. Under this proposal, owners of farm and ranchland outside the county's Urban Growth Boundary will be able to cede development rights to builders who are planning developments inside the line.

The system will result in more dense, concentrated development in the heart of the urban area, while providing rural landowners with a viable economic alternative to selling their farms to developers.

These signs are positive, but Audubon's work is far from over. Conserving the headwaters of the Kissimmee is vital to the restoration of the Kissimmee River and the Everglades further south. Audubon continues to make this effort a major priority.



Audubon's 2006 Legislative Priority: Money for Public Lands

BABCOCK RANCH, EVERGLADES AND LAKE OKEECHOBEE TOP THE LIST

As this issue of the Naturalist goes to print, the Florida Legislature is beginning its 2006 session. This is an election year, so the session will be characterized by politics. Candidates for statewide offices will try to take credit for initiatives, and legislative leaders will attempt to fulfill the expectations of their most influential donors and supporters.

Florida's growth continues unabated; 2005's growth management package did little to stem the loss of natural lands to development. Here is a short list of Audubon's legislative priorities:

Appropriations - Governor Bush issued a budget that calls for record spending—\$745

million—on land acquisition. Audubon supports these highlights:

- \$310 million to buy 74,000 acres of Babcock Ranch
- \$300 million for Florida Forever (\$105 million goes to conservation lands)
- \$135 million for the Everglades (a \$35-million increase)
- \$25 million for Lake Okeechobee
- \$100 million for water supply and cleanup programs (funded last year via SB 444)
- \$35 million for other priority water projects

Florida Forever - Audubon is working with a coalition of conservation organizations to promote

accelerated funding of Florida Forever. The goal is to double conservation land expenditures to \$210 million.

Wetlands - Audubon will oppose legislation likely to be sponsored by Rep. Mitch Needleman (Brevard) to redefine boundaries between publicly-owned shorelines and privately-owned uplands. The bill will probably be written in a way that allows more shoreline development. Some experts predict that hundreds of thousands of acres of land now considered public will be conveyed to adjacent landowners.

President's Budget Proposes Increased Funding for Everglades Restoration

The 2007 President's Budget sent to Congress in February 2006 contained increased Everglades funding, signaling to Floridians that Everglades restoration is a national priority to which the federal partner remains committed.

The budget proposes \$192 million, including \$112 million to improve the water flows through Everglades National Park to Florida Bay and to restore Kissimmee River. If fully funded by Congress, this would result in a 14 percent increase over last year. Continued and increased funding is essential to keeping restoration on track and the federal/Florida partnership strong.

Financial information about National Audubon Society can be obtained by writing to us at 700 Broadway, New York, NY 10003 or as stated below: NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY FLORIDA REGISTRATION # CH281: A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES BY CALLING TOLL-FREE, 1-800-435-7352 WITHIN THE STATE. REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL, OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE.

Photo of bald eagle by R. J. Wiley

Other wetlands legislation may propose allowing the state to assume wetlands permits for impacts less than 10 acres. The proposed bill will use federal rules, which are stronger than state rules, and cover isolated wetlands in Northwest Florida. Audubon will work with other conservation groups to secure the use of the Environmental Resource Permit for Northwest Florida, where most developments currently have to get only federal permits.

Coastal Protection - In 2005 Audubon helped pass legislation establishing the Oceans and Coastal Resources Council. Science director Jerry Lorenz sits on that council, which has

proposed an aggressive research plan to the Legislature. Research will increase knowledge of the health of coastal habitats and the Atlantic and Gulf waters, an agenda that Audubon has pushed with success.

Wildlife - Audubon will again seek "state bird" status for the Florida scrub-jay, the state's only endemic bird. Threatened by loss of its upland scrub habitat, the designation should help to protect the species and its habitat.

Be Part of the Solution!

Audubon of Florida needs your help to make its legislative agenda successful this session! Here are some resources to keep you plugged in to the process:

ONLINE SUNSHINE: Information about the Florida Legislature including representatives' and senators' pages, bills and agendas are posted in the clearinghouse at www.leg.state.fl.us. As session nears completion, the process moves quickly: Keep up online with bills of importance to you!

FLORIDA CONSERVATION NETWORK:

Sign up for Audubon's Florida Conservation Network (FCN) with weekly Advocate updates on how the environment is faring in this legislative session. Members also receive "action alerts" calling attention to key issues and providing instructions on how to engage representatives electronically and make their voices heard! www.ga1.org/natureadvocate

EVERGLADES CONSERVATION NETWORK:

Similar to the FCN, the Everglades Conservation Network (ECN) distributes monthly Restore updates and as-needed action alerts specifically on issues of importance to Everglades restoration. www.ga1.org/natureadvocate

AUDUBON'S ACTIVE ADVOCATE CORPS:

If you'd like to do more, join the Active Advocate Corps! We'll tap you when you can really make a difference by calling your elected officials or meeting with them in their district offices. To join, email your name and contact info to jwraithmell@audubon.org

Visit www.audubonofflorida.org

Click on **Donate** to support Audubon of Florida's initiatives or mail your contribution to Audubon of Florida, 444 Brickell Avenue, Suite 850, Miami FL 33131



Donate

Audubon and its partners active on many fronts to **PROTECT THE COASTAL EVERGLADES**

In southern Miami-Dade County lie 95,000 acres of wetlands that link Everglades National Park and Biscayne Bay. Audubon of Florida, the Tropical Audubon Society Chapter and environmental partners are working on many fronts to protect and restore these natural lands.

The diverse habitats are home to many wildlife species, including several federally- and state-listed endangered species and many shore and migratory birds. The endangered Florida panther, the wood stork and the threatened Eastern indigo snake all live there. And the systems were called “critical to the chain of life for a variety of plants and animals” in a joint land-acquisition effort by the State of Florida and Miami-Dade County.

To restore this important area, Audubon of Florida and Tropical Audubon are working on a number of initiatives, from the Hold the Line Campaign to convince Miami-Dade County not to extend its Urban Development Boundary (UDB), to advocating for land acquisition for conservation, and working to improve important components of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan.

Tropical Audubon and The National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) have also filed a lawsuit in federal court against the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The groups charge that the Corps violated federal law by allowing a controversial wetland fill permit to move forward for one purpose—agriculture—although the property owner, Atlantic Civil, and prospective developer, Lennar, have filed plans with the State of Florida to build a mega-development on the site.

In February, environmental concerns about extending Miami-Dade’s UDB were validated when the Florida Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) recommended that County Commissioners deny nine proposed developments outside the county line, citing water supply, traffic and impacts on schools. “This is encouraging,” said Cynthia Guerra, Executive Director of Tropical Audubon. “It means that grassroots works, and we have a message and a presence.”

Earlier, Audubon commended Governor Bush, the Florida Department of Consumer Affairs, and the South Florida Water Management District for refusing Miami-Dade County’s request for more water because the County had not identified alternative water sources or implemented water conservation and re-use programs.

The State’s position spoke to all of Florida: urban vitality depends upon a healthy natural environment and ample natural resources. Audubon also recommended that the District complete the overdue process of reserving water for these natural systems before granting increases to local governments. Urban sprawl without programs to reserve water for the environment will harm our natural heritage and quality of life.

Audubon is bringing all these tools to bear to restore the Coastal Everglades and the wildlife and birds that depend on this habitat for survival. Visit www.audubonofflorida.org and www.tropicalaudubon.org to learn how you can help in these efforts to preserve and restore our natural heritage.



Photo of Florida panther by R. J. Wiley

Audubon Center for Birds of Prey contributes to **HOOT** Educator's Guide



Photo of burrowing owl by Susie Warren.

ADOPT-a-BIRD

Audubon Center for Birds of Prey Adopt-a-Bird program is an important way to participate in the conservation of Florida's magnificent raptors housed and treated at the Center. An "adoption" is an annual investment in the care, feeding and medical treatment of birds brought to the Center for care as well as those permanently housed at the Center for community education programs. Become a Buddy, Parent, Guardian or Protector by adopting a bird which resides at the Center.

YOUR HELP IS NEEDED.

Contributions also support Center educational programs that help protect these species in special habitats throughout Florida.

For more information, call 407-644-0190, or check out the Web site at <http://www.audubonofflorida.org/conservation/adopt.htm>

Photo of caracara at Center for Birds of Prey by Susie Warren.

In cooperation with Walden Media, Audubon Center for Birds of Prey contributed education content for an Educator's Guide to HOOT, a movie being released in spring 2006, based on Carl Hiaasen's novel of the same name. The movie is about a boy who moves to Florida and unearths a threat to a local population of burrowing owls.

The Educator's guide targets grades 6-8 and meets national content and educational standards for science, language arts, social studies and character education. The Center will distribute these guides free of charge to school groups and visitors.

Copies are available at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, and available Chapters may request them for use in their education programs. They are excellent resources for a variety of educational programs including activities focused on habitat, advocacy and, of course, burrowing owls. Contact the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey 407-644-0910 for copies, or visit www.walden.com/html/pub/hoot/hoot_edGuide.jsp





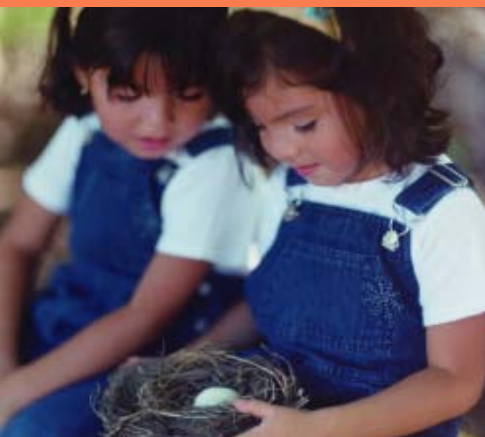
Audubon Center
for Birds of Prey salutes
Susie Warren

Susie Warren was named Audubon of Florida's volunteer of the year for 2005. A volunteer at the Center for Birds of Prey since January of 2004, she has performed every task the staff has asked, from feeding their small patients to helping to maintain the clinic and grounds. Warren handles some of the glove-trained raptors, and is a trained docent, leading tours at the Center and accompanying staff on offsite programs.

One of Warren's most valuable skills is as a photographer, donating pictures of the resident birds to the Center for postcards, buttons and framed photographs. Her proudest accomplishment was the selection of her photo of "Queenie" the barn owl for the program cover at the 2005 Space Coast Birding Festival.

"Susie's donation of a state-of-the-art incubator led to the successful hatching of a great horned owlet last winter, and her in-kind donations to the Center are invaluable," said Katie Warner, Center administrator. "She is the embodiment of the ideal volunteer—committed, dependable, willing to tackle any job, and a joy to work with. It is volunteers like Susie who truly keep organizations such as Audubon in business, by spreading their enthusiasm and wisdom on a daily basis."

YOUR BENEFICIARIES **There are more of them than you realize!**



At Audubon, we have always understood the vital connection between people and nature.

By including a bequest to Audubon in your will, you can help ensure a brighter future for both.

Make your bequest by asking your lawyer to use the following language in your will:

I bequeath to the National Audubon Society, Inc., a not-for-profit organization located at 700 Broadway, New York, NY 10003, _____% of my residuary estate for the benefit of Audubon of Florida.



To learn more, call for a free brochure. Wayne Mones, Vice President, Planned giving, National Audubon Society, 700 Broadway, New York, NY 10003, 212-979-3033. www.plannedgifts@audubon.org



Christie Anderberg Ahhochee Hill Sanctuary Manager

Before coming to Florida, Christie Anderberg worked with a variety of non-profit and government agencies in eastern Massachusetts preserving open space and natural resources. These included Massachusetts Audubon Society, Trust for Public Land, and Metacomet Land Trust. Each organization had specific objectives for preserving a targeted parcel, including wildlife habitat, drinking water protection, hiking trails, working agricultural landscapes or rural character.

In December 2005, she helped arrange the release of a bald eagle at the Ahhochee Hill Sanctuary following its rehabilitation at Audubon's Center for Birds of Prey. She has worked with the Hernando County Audubon Society, the Native Plant Society, and the Boy Scouts to organize volunteers for conservation work at the sanctuary. "My respect goes to the late Lisa von Borowsky, former owner and caretaker of this sanctuary, for having had the foresight and courage to prevent future development and preserve the land for whatever wildlife lives and grows here. It remains a peaceful haven in a rapidly changing world," Anderberg said.

Audubon's Ahhochee Hill Sanctuary is open on a limited basis to Audubon Chapters and members for bird watching and nature study. For information, contact Christie Anderberg at 352-797-3545 or by email at canderberg@audubon.org

Maggie Bowman touched many in her quest to protect natural resources

Maggie Bowman, a legendary bird watcher and advocate for the environment, quietly died in her sleep on February 8, at age 91, in Vero Beach. "She was a giant in the community for conservation of the environment," said Richard Baker, president of the 41-year-old Pelican Island Audubon Society that Bowman helped found. "It was her idea to start the Environmental Learning Center," which eventually opened in 1992, Baker said. Since then, the center has hosted thousands of county schoolchildren on annual field trips to the Indian River Lagoon.

A native of Rhinebeck, N.Y., Bowman came to Indian River County in 1964 with a background as a military cryptographic technician. In 1980 she was appointed to the county's Planning and Zoning Commission, and was appointed a county commissioner in 1983. An advocate of low density, low rise development, she was elected to the position she held until 1992.

Memorial contributions may be made to Pelican Island Audubon Society, P.O. Box 1833, Vero Beach, FL 32960 or to the Environmental Learning Center, 255 Live Oak Drive, Vero Beach, FL 32963.

Audubon of Florida Staff

Audubon of Florida State Office

444 Brickell Avenue, Suite 850
Miami, FL 33131
(305) 371-6399 (305) 371-6398 Fax

David E. Anderson

Executive Director

Mark Kraus, Ph D,

Deputy State Director

Tim Bachmeyer, Ph D,

Director of Development

Patricia Donaldson, *Accounting Associate*

Christopher Farrell, *Staff Scientist*

Susan Fortunow, *Executive Assistant*

Jamie Furgang, *Everglades Policy Associate*

Vicky Johnston, *Development Associate*

Wendy Martinez,

Contracts & Administration Associate

Denise Palacios,

Receptionist/Office Assistant

Traci Romine,

Everglades Ecosystem Policy Director

José Taín-Alfonso,

State Finance & Budget Manager

Brenda Williamson,

Deputy Director of Development

Part time: Florance Eloi, Jennifer Kleinbaum,

Scott Withers, *Educators*

Christie Anderberg, *Ahhochee Hill Manager*

Brad Cornell,

Big Cypress Ecosystem Policy Associate

Tallahassee Office

2507 Callaway Road, Suite 103

Tallahassee, FL 32303

(850) 222-2473 (850) 224-6056 Fax

Eric Draper, Deputy Dir. of Policy

Jacqueline Sulek, *Chapter Coordinator*

Julie Wraithmell, *Conservation Associate*

Tavernier Science Center

115 Indian Mound Trail

Tavernier, FL 33070

(305) 852-5092 (305) 852-8012 Fax

Jerome Lorenz, Ph D,

State Director of Research

Kate Banick, *Research Associate*

Lucille Canavan, *Administrative Assistant*

Luis Canedo, *Field Technician*

Bradley Dunker, *Biologist*

Greg Ellis, *Biologist*

Peter Frezza, *Research Coordinator*

David Green, *Graduate Associate*

Brynne Langan, *Research Associate*

Brennan Mulrooney, *Field Technician*

Jennifer Rehage, *Ecologist*

Michelle Robinson, *Biologist*

Shawn Smith, *Senior Scientist*

John Steiglitz, *Field Technician*

Matthew Williamson, *Biologist*

Joseph Wolkowsky,

Center Science Coordinator

Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries

410 Ware Blvd., Suite 702

Tampa, FL 33619

(813) 623-6826 (813) 623-4086 Fax

Ann Paul,

Tampa Bay Area Regional Coordinator

Ann Hodgson,

Gulf Coast Ecosystem Science Coordinator

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary

375 Sanctuary Road West

Naples, FL 34120

(239) 348-9151 (239) 348-9155 Fax

Ed Carlson, Sanctuary Director

Rebecca Beck, *Youth Education Coordinator*

Steven Corriveau, *Maintenance Supervisor*

Paul Gootkin, *Assistant Nature Store Manager*

Mike Knight,

Resource Management Specialist

Jason Lauritsen,

Big Cypress Ecosystem Science Coordinator

Bobby Ray Nichols, *Building Caretaker*

Lori Piper, *Office Manager*

Mary Short, *Nature Store Manager*

Sally Stein, *Volunteer/Adult Ed. Coordinator*

Part time: Julia Askey, *Bethany Summeralls*

Sales Associates;

Roger Barry, Gerald Griggs,

Mike Shunney, Amy Wiggins,

Admissions Associates;

Maryann Summeralls, *Store Associate*

Ridge and Street Audubon Centers

P.O. Box 148

200 N. Crooked Lane Drive

Babson Park, FL 33827

(863) 638-1355

Florida Keys Restoration Trust Fund

11400 Overseas Highway, Suite 204

Marathon, FL 33050

(305) 289-9988 (305) 289-0073 Fax

Audubon Center for Birds of Prey and AOF Central Florida Office

1101 Audubon Way, Maitland, FL 32751

(407) 644-0190 (407) 644-8940 Fax

(407) 539-5700 (407) 539-5701 Fax

Katie Gill Warner, Center Administrator

Beth Evans, *Raptor Clinic Technician*

Dianna Flynt, *Rehabilitation Supervisor*

Charles Lee, *Director of Advocacy*

Samantha Stock, *Raptor Clinic Technician*

Heidi Sturgeon,

Aviary/Rehabilitation Supervisor

Lynda White, *Eagle Watch Coordinator*

PT: Gina Holt, Teri Marks, *Ed/Vol. Program Coord.*

Lake Okeechobee Campaign

100 Riverwood Circle

Lorida, FL 33857

(863) 467-8497 (863) 467-8460 Fax

Paul Gray, Ph D, *Science Coordinator*

Lake Okeechobee Watershed

SAVE THE DATE! Audubon Assembly 2006 October 19-21

Due to the cancellation last fall, we are gearing up for a great event this October! Plan on joining us for a weekend of networking, education, advocacy and birding!

Location: Holiday Inn Cocoa Beach Oceanfront Resort

Special rate: \$89.99/night.

Reserve rooms now at 800-206-2724.

Special Audubon rate good through September 27 only.

Cocoa Beach is near fabulous birding hot spots including Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and Cape Canaveral. This casual beachfront setting will be fun for the entire family.

Don't miss it! Plan to attend Florida's largest gathering of conservation-minded citizens. Join chapter leaders and members, Audubon staff, wildlife professionals, environmental advocates, scientists, students, agency and elected officials, and other Floridians to network and learn about the environment.

Details including Assembly registration information, programs, exhibits and field trips will appear in the summer Naturalist, and will be available online at www.audubonofflorida.org in July.



Photo of long-billed curlew by Christina Evans.

Audubon's Mission *To conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats, for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity.*



444 Brickell Avenue, Suite 850, Miami, Florida 33131
Tel 305 371 6399 Fax 305 371 6398
www.audubonofflorida.org

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Executive Director *David E. Anderson*

Communications Coordination *Traci Romine*

Editorial Consultant *Susan Cumins*

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Florida ranches provide the open habitat this threatened subspecies needs to survive.*



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