

Audubon

FLORIDA
Naturalist

The Gulf Issue

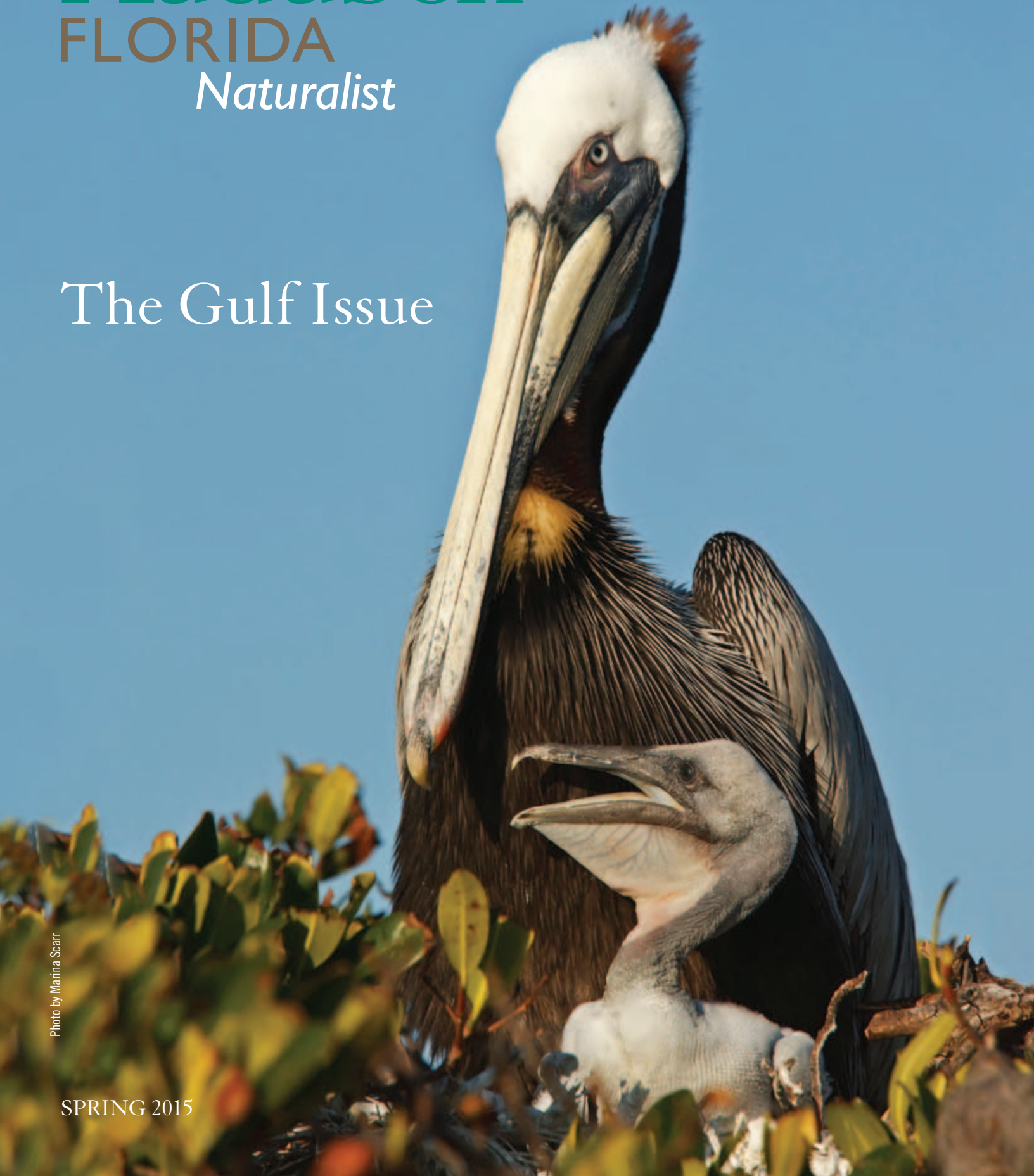


Photo by Marina Scarr

SPRING 2015

2015 Florida Audubon Society Leadership

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Photo By Ralph Arwood



**Steve Lynch, Chair of the Board
Florida Audubon Society**

Dear Audubon Members & Supporters,

We are calling this issue of the Audubon Florida Naturalist “The Gulf Issue.” It is a five-year progress report on the recovery of the people, birds, and places that were affected by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster. This issue also focuses on the prevention of other threats to Florida’s coastal habitats. The following pages are full of wonderful examples of local people taking care of the habitat and wildlife that make Florida’s Gulf Coast such a special place.

Audubon Florida has sanctuaries and chapters throughout Florida’s Gulf areas. I am proud of the way our professional staff work with volunteer leadership to make sure Audubon maintains a presence along the coast. This allows us to respond to serious threats including proposals to over-develop state parks and surplus public lands.

Julie Wraithmell, the leader of our Gulf recovery work and Audubon Florida’s Director of Wildlife Conservation, keeps a sealed jar of oily sand from a state park in Walton County on her desk. It’s a reminder that plugging the leak was only the first step in the recovery of the Gulf Coast.

We need to make sure that the penalties from the Gulf spill go to true ecosystem recovery, not just economic development. That means we need people like you - members and volunteers - to stay involved in the Gulf Restoration process. Residents of coastal counties can attend meetings and communicate with their public officials about these priorities. You can find more information on the RESTORE Act process (including a calendar of local RESTORE events) here: <http://www.RestoreFloridasGulf.org>

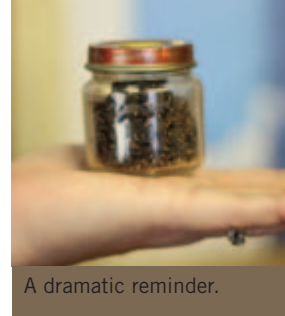
At the same time, the threat of sea level rise looms, as we watch coastal areas slowly erode and become inundated with seawater. That is why we trained people to be Climate Messengers at the Audubon Assembly last fall. Climate messengers around Florida are advocating for local governments to work with nature when controlling erosion and saltwater intrusion, rather than against it.

If you missed the training, you can still take part! Audubon Florida has posted a set of useful videos and powerpoint presentations online, to help you get your point across to public officials and your community. Videos and PowerPoint presentations will help you to get your point across in meetings with public officials and when educating people in your community. Download the materials and be sure to report your results.

Working together, I believe we will recover the Gulf for the benefit of people and wildlife. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Steve Lynch
Chairman, Audubon Florida



Make a Difference at www.GivetoAudubonFlorida.org



Citizens Must Lead Fight to Save Florida's Gulf Coast

*Eric Draper, Executive Director
Audubon Florida*

Dear Friends,

Five years ago, while opposing legislation that would allow oil drilling in Florida's coastal waters, I watched legislators suddenly table the bill after learning of the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster. I hated the pro-drilling bill because I love swimming in clear Gulf water and could not stomach the idea of oil rigs within sight of our beautiful beaches. Fear of oil spills was a secondary concern but the disaster was a reality check as we saw the enormous damage to the environment and economy unfold.

You may remember the images of flames and black smoke against an azure blue sky. We all felt sorrow for the loss of life and horror as the news unfolded about the challenge of controlling the oil billowing from the ocean floor.

As the oil slicks moved toward coastal areas, Audubon mobilized volunteers in Florida and other states to prepare to rescue birds at risk from the oil. Our teams also guarded nesting birds at risk from the sudden presence of crews on the beaches.

It wasn't long before the oil washed up in Louisiana and Alabama, devastating their delicate coastal ecosystems. The images of oiled birds, ruined habitat, and the effect the spill had on local communities will forever be etched into our memories.

On June 24, 2010 the nightmare became real on Pensacola Beach. In response, teams set up recovery efforts up and down the coastline – often working in highly sensitive nesting areas at the peak of breeding season. Visiting the beaches, I was shocked to witness the incredible damage to our birds and habitat from both the oil and the recovery efforts.

Audubon Florida's response to the spill and recovery has been to work with public lands agencies to steward the nesting and wintering sites for coastal birds. We added staff and called on the time and talents of thousands of volunteer coastal stewards. Those coastal stewards are also passionate advocates who helped deliver passage of the RESTORE Act, requiring Deepwater Horizon penalties to be spent on Gulf recovery. The law anticipates a state plan, but politics has stalled that effort.

Audubon has urged Governor Rick Scott and the Florida Department of Environment Protection to craft a Florida Gulf Ecosystem plan to prioritize use of the oil spill penalties and other state and federal funds. This will help get the best results for coastal habitats and wildlife. We hope to report good news on that soon.

For now we know that every remaining bit of Gulf habitat is important and we must guard our coasts against future threats. Birds and their habitats are resilient but disaster recovery is costly. By assigning dedicated people to monitor and count birds, prevent disturbance, and control predators, Audubon will guarantee abundant birdlife on Florida's coasts and throughout the Atlantic Flyway. *That is our job.*

We also must demand that policy-makers create a plan for investing funds in protecting, restoring, and managing habitats for years to come. *That is their job.*

Thank you for all that you do for Florida.

To stay informed on Gulf Restoration issues, please sign-up to receive our electronic newsletters: <http://fl.audubon.org/signup>

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eric Draper'.

Eric Draper, Executive Director
Audubon Florida

Hope and Progress: Five Years Since Deepwater Horizon

The 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster was a horrific scene for all who love the Gulf Coast. In those difficult months, many Audubon members took comfort knowing that our organization already had a unique capacity to help Florida's coastal birds. With an 80-year legacy of waterbird protection in Tampa Bay, devoted chapters around the Gulf, and a growing network of effective beach-nesting bird stewardship programs, Audubon Florida was ready to help.

Although BP restricted how the public could take part in the clean-up, Audubon directed citizen volunteers toward helping Florida's coastal birds have the most successful season they could, to offset catastrophic losses elsewhere. Audubon's team also documented and reported environmental impacts as they emerged, like oil on the beach and damage to bird nesting areas.

As the 2010 nesting season passed, Audubon shifted focus to a new goal: ensure that local, state, and federal decision-makers use penalty fines from the disaster to restore the Gulf of Mexico, its vulnerable coastal birds and their critical habitat.

In the immediate aftermath of the spill, Audubon Florida was successful in enlisting support from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Recovered Oil for Wildlife Funds to build increased capacity for our coastal bird stewardship model across the Panhandle counties.

In 2012, over a hundred donors and a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Recovered Oil for Wildlife Fund helped Audubon acquire the last private inholding vulnerable to development in the Panhandle: Franklin County's Lanark Reef. Lanark is a major coastal bird nesting and wintering site – a baby bird factory – and is now being considered for Global Important Bird Area status.

Later that year, Audubon advocates and other conservation organizations joined together to help with the passage of the federal RESTORE Act. This bill set up the infrastructure that ensured penalty money from the disaster would be invested in Gulf restoration.

In 2013, a Natural Resource Damage early restoration contract was awarded to Audubon to increase the protection and management of nesting shorebird habitat at 19 vulnerable Panhandle sites.

In 2014, a Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund Award enabled Audubon to expand work to support wintering bird conservation and rooftop colony management. This award supports our efforts to restore the eroding St. George Island Causeway - a vital nesting site for thousands of birds, including Brown Pelicans, five

tern species, American Oystercatchers, Laughing Gulls, and more.

In recent months, Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund support enabled Audubon to hire a seasonal stewardship coordinator in Sarasota and a full-time coastal bird stewardship coordinator in Collier County who will partner with Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in Naples. The Fund also will support boat transportation for volunteer bird stewards traveling to the seabird rookery on Three Rooker Bar in partnership with the Florida Park Service and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Five years is not a long time to refocus our Gulf mission. But over that period, Audubon Florida has grown from four full or part-time coastal staff to more than twenty. In all, our team of volunteers, staff, and citizen scientists protect more than 130 coastal bird sites up and down the Gulf.

Thanks to you – our members - hundreds of thousands of baby birds have hatched at sites monitored by Audubon Florida since the disaster. *This is what hope for the Gulf looks like.*

And we're not done yet. Join us in our vision for Gulf restoration and bird conservation on the following pages, and learn how you can help make the Gulf whole again.

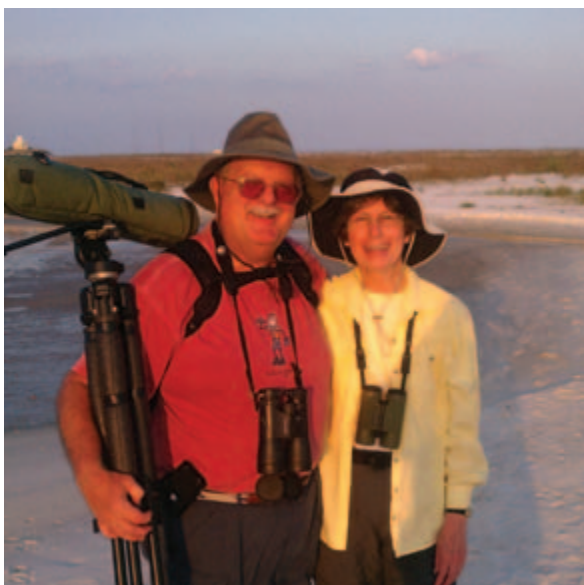


Photo by George Willson

Thank You to Our Chapter Partners for their Gulf Restoration Leadership

Francis M. Weston Audubon Society
Choctawhatchee Audubon Society
Bay County Audubon Society
Apalachee Audubon Society
Citrus County Audubon Society
Hernando Audubon Society
West Pasco Audubon Society
Tampa Audubon Society

Clearwater Audubon Society
St. Petersburg Audubon Society
Sarasota Audubon Society
Venice Area Audubon Society
Peace River Audubon Society
Audubon of Southwest Florida
Audubon of the Western Everglades
Florida Keys Audubon Society

"Audubon Florida was there when the oil came ashore on Pensacola Beach. And since that time I've watched their coastal team grow into the leading conservation organization on Florida's Gulf Coast. I'm proud to be part of it."

– James Brady, President, Francis M. Weston Audubon Society, pictured here with his companion Betsy Tetlow.

The Case for Coastal Bird Conservation

A motivated volunteer is one of the most important tools for protecting shorebirds.

In 2014, Clearwater Audubon's David Hopkins and Paul Ingham noticed a flock of Least Terns on Belleair Beach, an area where nesting hadn't occurred since 2007. Looking closer, they saw dozens of speckled eggs hidden in shallow nest scrapes on the beach and knew they had to protect the nests from beachgoers. Gathering stakes and twine, David and Paul roped off the newly formed colony and began a daily ritual of guarding the nests. Soon, hundreds of Black Skimmers moved in to join the terns. Within weeks, the eggs hatched, and they were guarding chicks on the beach. And by summer's end, more than 100 young Least Terns and 175 young Black Skimmers took flight – a new generation survived and fledged with the help of Audubon stewardship.

Coastal birds are in decline and need help from problem solvers like David and Paul - and from people like you. Loss of habitat, oil spills, human disturbance, decline in prey, and increased predation threaten nesting areas across Florida's coast. What remains requires human intervention to guarantee successful nesting.

Audubon Florida's coastal bird program manages and protects nesting sites throughout the Gulf Coast, so birds like American Oystercatchers, Least Terns, Reddish Egrets, Brown Pelicans, Snowy Plovers, Red Knots, Piping Plovers, and Black Skimmers can survive.

Over the next five years, Audubon staff and volunteers will work at more than 150 nesting sites statewide to help secure the future of Florida's coastal birds. Lack of nesting areas has forced some species like Least Terns to nest on gravel roofs. Migrants such as Red Knots depend on vanishing stopover areas for rest and food. Fewer than 500 Snowy Plovers remain in Florida. But we can reverse these trends.

Audubon Florida deploys staff and volunteers to monitor and defend coastal birds. And Audubon is the voice of conservation urging government agencies to do a better job of protecting habitats. Our science + advocacy approach gets results for coastal birds.

The 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill awakened Floridians to the risks facing our coastal habitats. And with their help, Audubon has made protecting coastal birds a primary focus. As a result, more than 100 sites fledged tens of thousands of chicks last year. Audubon's unique approach is enlisting and training citizen scientists to monitor and steward important bird areas.

The challenges facing these birds are daunting, but we are confident that our strategy of boots on the ground and science-informed advocacy will pay off. People do care and will respond if informed and educated.

Meeting the Challenges of Sea Level Rise

Sea level rise threatens both the built and natural environment. Audubon is growing a vibrant network of Climate Messengers to ensure that wildlife populations and natural habitats are part of Florida's coastal planning process. Our goals are 1) Identify and secure habitats for retreat corridors as the shore

migrates inland, 2) Get sea level rise projects to consider impacts to natural resources, 3) Shift public strategies from defending of the built environment at all costs to accepting the need to retreat from rising seas.

Audubon's climate messengers are front-line communicators to local and state decision-makers to promote working with nature instead of against it as communities address the growing impacts of erosion and saltwater intrusion.



Photo by Daniel Ewert

Florida's Coastal Birds Need You

From the beaches to the Capitol, Audubon is making a difference for Florida's coastal birds and their habitat. But we need to raise money to pay the costs of managing our network of volunteers and staff to monitor and guard nesting sites.



Photo by David Macri

Birds now depend on us for survival in the face of threats ranging from development to sea level rise. But the biggest threat they face is indifference. Indifference means we will not have the people power or money to do the job. Without professional staff to organize the volunteers, without boats and other equipment, without advocacy for better habitat management, we could fail our coastal birds and lose the marvelous variety and richness of life on Florida's shores.

You can help by making a multi-year gift to to recover Florida's coastal birds. Visit <http://www.GivetoAudubonFlorida.org> and click on Coastal Conservation right now.

A Restored Environment, A Vibrant Economy

In order for Gulf Restoration to be successful in Florida, it must meet the Gulf's problems at their source. This is true not just in the Panhandle, but Gulf Coast-wide. Restoration projects must include those enhancing freshwater flows, protecting landscapes, restoring past damage, safeguarding significant natural features, and ensuring ongoing management of these resources for future generations.

Some of the most important projects for which Audubon is advocating include:



Lower Suwannee River and Gulf Watershed Easements, Cedar Key \$25M

This 46,500-acre less-than-fee project would buffer the adjacent Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge, and thousands of acres of other coastal conservation lands, preserving habitats for colonial nesting waterbirds and protecting a vital tidal watershed for water quality and quantity. Easements would provide habitat within their boundaries as well as downstream, maintain the local forest-based economy, and provide recreational opportunities for future generations.



Photo by George Willison

Cape Sable Restoration, Monroe County \$8.6M



Photo by Mac Stone

Historically, the marshes of Cape Sable were ditched in an attempt to drain the land. Now, with every tide, these canals transport sediment and organic material eroded out of the marshes, and deposit the muck in Florida Bay, impacting the Bay's resources too. This project will restore critical interior marsh habitats on Cape Sable by reducing the intrusion of salt water conveyed by man-made canals. The failed earthen dams on Raulerson Brothers Canal will be replaced with a sheet pile structure and flow through East Side Creek will be restricted with a similar structure. Failing earthen dams on two smaller canals, Slagle's Ditch and House Ditch, will be repaired.

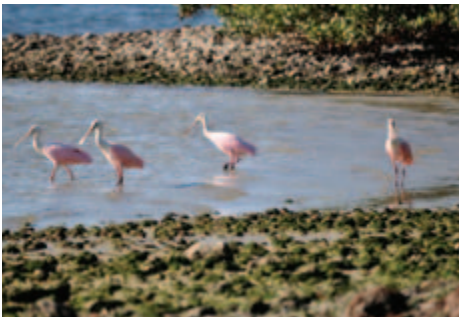


“Audubon has urged Governor Scott and the Department of Environmental Protection to craft a Florida Gulf Ecosystem plan to prioritize the use of the oil spill penalties and other state and federal funds to get the best results for coastal habitats and wildlife. Billions of dollars will be available for Gulf ecosystem and economic projects. But there is real competition for those dollars and no assurances yet that the funds will be used for the most important purposes. In fact, there are some signs that funds may be used to develop coastal areas instead of protecting and restoring habitat. To avoid having the RESTORE Act penalties misdirected, the State of Florida needs to work from a transparent plan that prioritizes spending where it will do the most good for Gulf waters and wildlife. To date, agency leaders have not followed through on Governor Scott's commitment to a Florida Gulf Ecosystem Plan. We will continue to press for guarantees that ecosystem restoration is the priority and enlist those who love Florida's Gulf Coast to stay involved in the decisions.”

– Eric Draper, Audubon Florida Executive Director

Alafia Banks Living Shoreline, Tampa Bay \$2.65M

The Richard T. Paul Alafia Banks Bird Sanctuary in Tampa Bay supports as many as 18,000 pairs of 17 species of colonial waterbirds, including Reddish Egrets, Roseate Spoonbills, Brown Pelicans and more. Unfortunately, the islands have been eroding as a result of waves driven by storms and ship traffic, with nesting trees toppling into the bay. Audubon has already installed 2,050 linear feet of wave attenuation structures, which provide habitat for benthic invertebrates, halt the erosion and create a calm water shoreline for foraging birds and their chicks. The new proposal would complete the remaining 4,075 feet of reef structures needed to halt the threat of erosion to this Globally Important Bird Area.

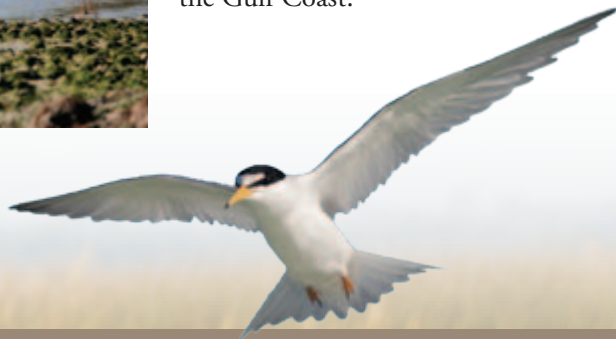


Coastal Bird Perpetual Management Fund, \$150-175M, generating \$7M annually



Photo by Keith Laakkonen

At Audubon, we understand that for coastal birds to succeed, they require careful protection every year, including posting, monitoring, stewardship and predator control. The establishment of a coastal bird management trust fund, along with a sustainable withdrawal rate, will provide long-term support for all conservation strategies that are critical to long-term recovery of the Gulf's coastal birds. In combination with existing funding levels for coastal bird management, the additional support will allow coastal birds to persist across the Gulf Coast.



C-43 Reservoir, Hendry County \$10M for initial phase of larger \$600M project

Construction of the 170,000-acre/feet C-43 West Basin Reservoir is critical to restoring the Caloosahatchee River estuary, an important contributor to the sustainability of Gulf of Mexico fisheries. Under current practice, in times of drought, the estuary suffers as fresh water is held back to meet water-supply needs. During the wet season, if Lake Okeechobee rises to a level that threatens the integrity of the Herbert Hoover Dike, large pulses of nutrient-laden water are discharged, triggering algal blooms, seagrass and oyster losses, and disrupting the estuary's salinity balance and juvenile fish nursery. More gradual and strategically planned releases of fresh water, enabled by increased multi-season water storage in the basin, are needed to ensure the health and continued productivity of the estuary and its contributions to the Gulf.



The C-43 Reservoir will help make signs like this a thing of the past.

“The RESTORE Act presents Florida with a once-in-a-lifetime chance to make the Gulf whole again. Audubon is advancing crucial habitat and watershed priorities like the protection and restoration of the Gulf’s most important tidewater landscapes– like Florida’s Big Bend Coast and its Suwannee River Watershed.”

– George Willson, Audubon Florida Board of Directors



Gulf Species Spotlight:

Reddish Egret



Gleefully dancing across

shallow lagoons, Reddish Egrets look carefree in their frolicking pursuit of prey. Casting a shadow with outstretched wings, they chase small fish across the flats, a delight for birdwatchers and beachgoers alike.

Few people realize that this state Threatened species was almost extirpated from Florida by the plume trade in the early 1900s. Citizen advocates helped bring about the protections that pulled Reddish Egrets back from the brink. That effort also gave rise to the founding of the Audubon Society.

The Reddish Egret is the rarest of North American herons and its recovery has been slow. Biologists estimate the current population to be only 10% of its pre-plume hunting size. Notably, Audubon wardens and biologists were the stewards of nesting Reddish Egrets' triumphant return to Tampa Bay in 1974.

Today the loss of nesting and foraging habitat eclipses the plume-hunting threat of a century ago. Loss of habitat came first to development and now, increasingly, to impacts from sea level rise. Further, the prey upon which Reddish Egrets survive—forage fish—depend in turn on healthy estuaries and watersheds. Reduced freshwater flows and nutrient inputs to estuaries cloud the future health of these biologically rich strongholds.

The long-term impacts of the Deepwater Horizon disaster on the egret's food web are complex to decipher. Conservation of this species must start by addressing threats that are well understood. Protecting habitat, preserving watersheds, improving estuarine health, and defending nesting areas from disturbance contribute to the continued recovery of this signature Gulf species.

As a next step, and in conjunction with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and Avian Research Conservation Institute, Audubon's Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries and Everglades Science Center biologists are embarking on a landmark survey of the state's nesting Reddish Egrets.

In 2015, our teams will validate survey methods and document seasonality of nesting behavior in different parts of the state. In 2016, statewide surveys will begin in earnest, documenting the most important places in Florida for Reddish Egrets and informing protections for breeding colonies and foraging areas. Future editions of the Naturalist magazine will keep you informed on this exciting research.

Just like in the early 1900s, Florida's birds need citizens to play an active role in conservation. You can help Audubon by reporting sightings of nesting Reddish Egrets to Ann Paul at apaul@audubon.org or call (813) 623-6826.

Gulf Species Spotlight: American Oystercatcher

Stately in their tuxedo-themed

plumage, with golden yellow eyes and an outrageous orange bill, few people realize the lethal elegance with which American Oystercatchers ply their trade. Many oyster predators use their brawn to crack and overcome the sharp, thick shells of their prey. Think of stone crabs and their hefty claws, as an example.

But oystercatchers employ a more elegant solution. As unwitting oysters filter water through their parted shells, the bird slips its slim, razor-sharp bill through the tiny gap, severing the bivalve's strong adductor muscle. This renders the oyster unable to close, allowing for the Oystercatcher to consume it at its leisure.

Few birds are more representative of the beauty, resilience, and vulnerability of Florida's coasts. Nesting on beaches and exposed oyster rakes, parents raise their chicks in a harsh environment of salt-water, sun, and sand. Up and running shortly after hatching, these precocious chicks follow their parents' lead. Chicks are colored as cryptically as their parents are bold. A chick's primary defense in the face of a threat is to freeze and camouflage itself with the speckled beach sand shore habitat.

Unfortunately, new threats have emerged against which their camouflage is insufficient. Development of coastal habitat, introduction of non-native predators like coyotes and domestic cats, and ship wakes and sea level rise overwashing and eroding shoreline nesting sites all contribute to the decline of this species. Further, when unwitting beachgoers flush parents, eggs and chicks are left vulnerable to cooking in the sun, predation, and even crushing underfoot.

Gulf restoration for American Oystercatchers means better, regular protection. Audubon staff and our incredible network of volunteers help by posting and patrolling key sites and advocating

for new legal protections. In Tampa Bay alone, sites managed by Audubon support 15-20% of the state's nesting population.

The long-term protection of this species also requires a strategic focus on sea level rise. This includes defending nesting and roosting sites from erosion and staving off shoreline armoring proposals. Coastal habitats must be preserved in order for them to migrate gradually upslope.

Restoration of this species also means thinking beyond just the breeding season. The summer breeding season is when populations of birds grow and also when the effects of disturbance are most apparent. But in Florida, the non-breeding winter months need special attention too. Our shores support 400-500 nesting pairs each summer, but far more oystercatchers - from all along the Atlantic seaboard - call Florida home in the winter.

For example, just three counties on Florida's Nature Coast alone support 1,500 oystercatchers each winter. That's 12% of the Atlantic Seaboard's population of American Oystercatchers.



Dedicated Audubon volunteers - like Pat and Doris Leary - are helping to call attention to the significance and vulnerability of these coastal wintering grounds. Their work includes documenting the number of birds as well as noting the codes of banded individuals and reporting back to researchers.

The future of American Oystercatchers is intimately tied to Gulf Restoration. The willingness of Audubon volunteers like you to get involved—stewarding, participating as citizen scientists, advocating for strong restoration projects, and addressing climate change and sea level rise—will make all the difference.

To learn more about how you can get help, please email flconservation@audubon.org

Working to Make Vital Gulf Habitats More Vibrant

Audubon Florida staff and volunteers are leading the coastal bird restoration effort across Florida's Gulf Coast Ecosystem. In partnership with our members and donors, Audubon's priority Gulf conservation projects are showing real results that will benefit generations of birds and wildlife.

Protecting the Beach Nesting Birds of Southwest Florida



Wilson's Plovers and their chicks will benefit from Audubon's guardianship.

At the southernmost extent of Collier County, a Gulf Coast collection of keys and sandbars hosts some of the most productive beach-nesting bird colonies in the state. Supported by devoted volunteer bird stewards since 2010, and with the help of Audubon of the Western Everglades' Policy Associate Brad Cornell, awareness of the vital importance of this part of the coast has grown. We're pleased that in 2015, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund is making it possible for Audubon to hire Adam DiNuovo, a full-time Coastal Bird Stewardship Project Manager, who will work in partnership with the researchers and resource managers at Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. Adam's work will include increased monitoring and protection of the region's migrating and wintering shorebirds, as well as growing the vibrant community of coastal bird stewards thriving at sites like Big Marco Pass Critical Wildlife Area.

Restoring the Largest Seabird Colony in the Panhandle



Unless the causeway's toppling sea walls are reinforced, this nesting island will return to the bay.

When the old bridge to St. George Island in the Panhandle's Franklin County was replaced by a newer, higher model, the old bridge was removed, leaving a long, serpentine causeway isolated in the middle of Apalachicola Bay. This island made of spoil and bulkheads evolved into one of the most important seabird nesting sites in the state, supporting thousands of pairs of seabirds including Brown Pelicans, Laughing Gulls, American Oystercatchers, and Royal, Caspian, Sandwich, Least and Gull-billed Terns. Unfortunately, the causeway—built in 1965—has seen better days, and its crumbling bulkheads threaten to return the island to the waves. With Gulf Restoration funding, Audubon is working with the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve—the causeway's manager—to undertake an ambitious restoration project: to repair the most essential crumbling bulkheads to improve the habitat stability and hopefully improve the longevity of this important colony. Engineering is underway this spring, and we hope construction will begin this fall, after the last chicks have fledged for 2015.

Saving Birds on Florida's Beaches in the Sky



Audubon's Caroline Stahala works on rooftop fencing to prevent chicks from falling.

Least Terns and Black Skimmers would normally nest on beaches, but for lack of undisturbed sites, many have shifted to nesting on flat gravel rooftops around the state—erstwhile beaches in the sky. With the benefit of chick protection practices refined by Clearwater and St. Petersburg Audubons, 2014 saw Audubon taking on the under-supported rooftop colonies of the Florida Panhandle. With Gulf Restoration support, Audubon's Michelle Landis coordinated surveys for the Panhandle's historic rooftops and efforts to return fallen chicks quickly at problem sites. In spring 2015, she marshalled volunteers and partners to “chick-proof” some of the rooftops which saw the most fallen chicks in 2014. “In 2014, we rescued and returned over 100 fallen chicks,” said Landis. “And many more likely fell down gutters to closed sewers where we were unable to save them. This chick-proofing is a great first step to improving the success of these rooftops. While we're happy to rescue chicks from the ground and return them to their rooftops, it's better if they never fall at all.”

Unlocking the Mystery of Snowy Plovers at Gulf Islands National Seashore

Photo by Maureen Durkin



Researchers place tiny transmitters on Snowy Plovers to track their movements.

The portion of Gulf Islands National Seashore stretching from Pensacola Beach to Navarre Beach is full of wide, rolling, blindingly white dunefields. It is as close to a Snowy Plover's idea of heaven as you can get. Black Skimmers and Least Terns also nest in this prime habitat, as do all three in the seashore's Ft. Pickens unit.

Unfortunately, this piece of shorebird perfection is marred by a high-speed state road, running down its length, and many chicks and adults are lost in collisions with vehicles. To reduce this mortality, Audubon is working with the Seashore, providing speed control message boards to communicate with motorists ignoring reduced speed zones; an outreach position at the seashore

also engages visitors and volunteers, and when necessary, drives a "pace car" with Seashore staff to slow traffic along the most vulnerable portions of the road. Audubon is also proud to be able to support SUNY researcher Maureen Durkin who is using impossibly small transmitters placed on diminutive Snowy Plover chicks, to track their

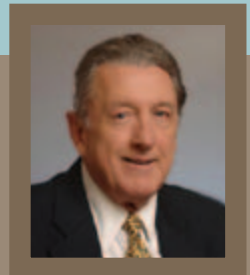
fates and model the impacts of the road, predators and more on these state Threatened birds.

With likely fewer than 500 Snowy Plovers remaining in Florida, no plover loss is a laughing matter, least of all one avoidable by so simple a measure as obeying a speed limit.

Audubon's Coastal Conservation Team

Tyler Brown
 Carol Cassels
 Kevin Christman
 Brad Cornell
 Adam DiNuovo
 Chris Farrell
 Marvin Friel
 Marianne Korosy
 Ed Kwater
 Michelle Landis
 Steve Mullin
 John Murphy
 Ann Paul

Mark Rachal
 Adrienne Ruhl
 Bonnie Samuelsen
 Holley Short
 Caroline Stahala
 Emily Stein
 Jacqui Sulek
 Caity Rieland-Smith
 Ezra Thompson
 Cortney Tyson
 Julie Wraithmell
 Liz Zinsser



"Audubon Florida's team of volunteers, field biologists, and scientists are the eyes and ears of Gulf Coast restoration. They are often the first feet in the sand in the morning and the last to leave at night. Important species, like Least Terns and Black Skimmers, benefit from their unwavering dedication."

– Mike Sheridan, Audubon Florida Board of Directors



Wilson's Plover with nest

Photo by Reiner Munguia

How to Get Involved to Protect Gulf Birds and Habitat

Have you wondered how you can be a hero for Florida's birds? Here is your chance. Find the Audubon volunteer program that speaks to your passion and embrace the opportunity and challenges that await.

Coastal Bird Stewardship:

Volunteers are trained to chaperone beach-nesting bird sites, to protect them from disturbance and educate beachgoers about these remarkable species. Volunteers typically work a 3-4 hour shift on a beach and thus need to be able to walk in sand, spend time in the summer sun, and engage with the public. With interest, volunteers can attend additional trainings to assist with coastal bird surveys, contributing through their citizen science to our understanding of these populations in Florida. Trainings are happening now and ongoing, as nesting season has begun. To get started, please email fconservation@audubon.org with your name and location.

parents with the help of a “chick-a-boom” saves many from predation and exposure. To get started, please email fconservation@audubon.org with your name and location.

Monofilament Clean-Up:

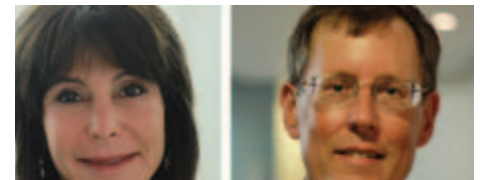


Fishing line is a brutal and unnecessary killer of Gulf birds.

also provide irreplaceable habitat for nesting sea turtles and millions of birds to nest, rest, and feed throughout each year. Learn more about birds and wildlife living in coastal areas, how to protect their habitat in the face of sea level rise, and help us take these messages to the public and decision makers throughout Florida.

Visit <http://floridaclimatemessenger.com> for more information on how you can participate in this important volunteer opportunity.

Advocate for Gulf Restoration Locally:



Decision makers need to hear from people like you about the importance of Gulf Restoration.



Rooftop Chick-Checkers and Stewards:



Volunteers monitor rooftop colonies and return fallen chicks.

For lack of undisturbed beaches, some beach-nesting birds such as Least Terns, Black Skimmers, American Oystercatchers, choose flat gravel rooftops as an alternative. Nesting on rooftops comes with new hazards—mostly related to chicks being washed down gutters and downspouts or falling off rooftop edges. Volunteers help “chickproof” (add fencing) to roofs where birds have historically nested prior to the season, identify and monitor new active rooftops, and function as “chick-checkers” during nesting season. Finding chicks on the ground and returning them to their rooftop

Audubon's Florida Coastal Island Sanctuaries' staff help coordinate fishing gear clean-ups in Tampa and Sarasota bays. Fishing line causes the death of many waterbirds each year who become entangled and die, often leaving chicks to starve in the nest. For information about how you can help with this year's clean-up, please contact mrachal@audubon.org with your name and location.

Colony Watch:

Volunteers can help count nesting birds and monitor for emerging threats at wading bird rookeries throughout southwest Florida. Some of these are monitored on foot, others by kayak or other vessel. To get started, please email apaul@audubon.org with your name and location.

Be a Climate Messenger:



Photo by Dave Kandz

Millions of people value Florida's coastal beaches and saltmarshes as special places in which to live and play. Our coastlines

Gulf Restoration isn't just happening in Tallahassee or Washington, D.C. It's happening in every Gulf Coast county in Florida. Many county governments have set up special RESTORE Act committees to decide how restoration dollars should be allocated. If you live in one of these counties, we need your help. You can track your county's progress and voice support for conservation and coastal birds throughout the RESTORE process. Contact jsulek@audubon.org with your name and location to learn more.

You can also visit our website at <http://www.RestoreFloridasGulf.org>.

Building the Future of Gulf Conservation

In the wake of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster, thousands of people from around the world made contributions in support of Audubon's efforts to protect Gulf birds. That incredible response continues as individuals, companies, and foundations help us make the Gulf whole again. Thank you for all that you do.

Batchelor Foundation "Gets" Baby Birds

For more than 20 years, the Batchelor Foundation's support of Audubon's science programs has made a huge difference for Florida's birds. Annual grants have helped support field research to recover Roseate Spoonbill colonies in Florida Bay and the Everglades. More recently funding has supported citizen science that has helped to inform conservation strategies for beach-nesting birds. The board of the Batchelor Foundation seems to get that science linked to conservation yields results. We are proud that the Batchelor Foundation grants have been put to good use building Audubon Florida's science programs.

In addition to advancing Audubon's science programs for beach nesting birds, Batchelor Foundation science grants have been used to support wading bird studies in the Everglades that demonstrate the importance of protecting and restoring shallow seasonal wetlands. Grants also support Audubon's citizen science monitoring programs for Southern Bald Eagle nests and colonies of Florida Scrub Jays. The Batchelor Foundation does not give money away, they challenge us to find matching funds that help leverage their dollars to do more for baby birds.

The Batchelor Foundation gets it-- and Florida's baby birds are better off for it.

Panhandle Least Terns Get Big Boost from Local Business

In the Panhandle, Gulf Coast Tree Specialists owner Randy Wright, donated thousands of dollars' worth of his company's time and equipment to assist Audubon Florida with the installation of "chick fencing" on several rooftop sites where Least Terns have nested in the past. These rooftops provide nesting habitat along the developed coasts of Northwest Florida, where Least Terns would naturally nest on flat, open beaches. This chick fencing will stop Least Tern chicks from falling off of the rooftops or flushing down drain spouts during the summer months.

Not only did Gulf Coast Tree Specialists provide a bucket truck to lift over 2,500 pounds of bricks and hardware cloth to the rooftop, but they also lifted Audubon staff and volunteers. And they stayed on site to assist in the installation.

Randy Wright and his staff have played a critical role in the protection of Least Terns in the Panhandle. Northwest Florida's rooftop nesting Least Terns will find a safe place to raise their young this summer thanks to Gulf Coast Tree Specialists.



Employees from Gulf Coast Tree Specialists teamed with Audubon and Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission staff at a rooftop nesting site in February 2015.



Photo by Reinier Munguia

Legislative Update 2015 – Boots on the Ground for Conservation

Eric Draper, Executive Director

Late last year I watched Governor Rick Scott approve the purchase of 620 acres of land next to Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. The Trust for Public Land worked with owner John Gargiulo to craft a deal supported by Naples Mayor John Corey, Bonita Springs Mayor Ben Nelson, and many, many others.

Deals like this, once routine, are now rare. Florida used to spend \$300 million a year on habitat, wetlands, and parks for people. Then the Legislature got stingy about land conservation.

We anticipated legislators' hostility when Audubon Florida and others pushed the Water and Land Conservation amendment. Over 74% of voters said yes and now 1/3 of an existing state tax goes into the Land Acquisition Trust Fund. If the Legislature follows the will of voters, the state will spend over \$20 billion over two decades on water and land conservation projects, including the Everglades.

But legislators are all but ignoring the land acquisition language of Amendment 1. House and Senate budgets include nominal funds for land conservation. Instead the budgets shift most of the voter approved funds to routine agency expenses.

Audubon members and the Water and Land Coalition are talking to legislators. We are opposed by the sugar company financed lobbying coalition Associated Industries of Florida, which calls for using Amendment 1 dollars to subsidize water supplies for development and agriculture.

We face a real problem winning support in the Legislature. They just don't seem to accept that voters clearly thought there would be an increase in funds to acquire land.

Relentless attacks on the role of government has created an atmosphere in Tallahassee and Washington that is hostile to environmental protection. Conservation advocates need to shift our approach.

Coastal conservation, Everglades restoration, land and water preservation, and climate adaptation require innovative strategies.

Success depends on place-based conservation. We will prevail when we rally people around specific places and projects. Places bring people together.

When Audubon Florida board leader Scott Taylor talks about the land needed to protect Wekiva Springs, when Bob

and Loretta Stamps talk about a wildlife refuge on Lake Apopka, and when Tropical Audubon Society promotes protecting the last fragments of habitat for rare butterflies, Florida's environment wins.

We need to talk about the places, the species, and the people who benefit from conservation. That is our winning message, and it's not new for Audubon. It is our founding strategy. It works.

Here is our challenge to you. Get to know the places that make Florida special.

- Go to the Florida Forever website to view the projects that will protect plants and animals and give people places to go to appreciate nature http://www.dep.state.fl.us/lands/FFplan_county.htm/.
- Look at local land use plans and the places designated for conservation. Learn the species that depend on those places and the proposed recreational uses.
- Read the Audubon Advocate. We work hard to keep you informed about what is going on at the Capitol. Sign up at <http://fl.audubon.org/signup> and follow Audubon Florida on social media sites.

Put your feet on the ground and focus your attention on the places and wildlife that make Florida so special. My friends, this is the best way to make a difference for our beautiful state.

Use the envelope on page 8 or visit
<http://www.GivetoAudubonFlorida.org>
to make a difference right now.

"Amendment 1 was a great victory for Florida. But now it's our job to make sure legislators trust the voters' decision by funding important environmental programs like Florida Forever, springs protection, and Everglades restoration."

– Heidi McCree, Audubon Florida Board of Directors



Audubon Florida's Conservation Team Welcomes New Staff, Including:



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Please contact Cathy Rodgers at crodders@audubon.org for Estate Planning or to make an end of year gift of stock. For other gifts go to www.GivetoAudubonFlorida.org. Gifts specified for Audubon Florida or Florida Audubon Society will be used exclusively to support Florida conservation.



Save the Date!

Audubon FLORIDA Assembly 2015

October 23-24, 2015 - Sheraton Orlando North - Maitland, Florida

Audubon Florida is proud to announce that the 2015 Audubon Assembly will be held at the beautiful Sheraton Orlando North, located just 10 minutes north of downtown Orlando and just minutes from the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey.

Join us for Florida's premiere conservation event.

- Hear inspiring talks from leading guest speakers.
- Participate in workshops on Audubon's citizen science and conservation programs.
- Explore unique natural places with host Orange, Seminole and Kissimmee Valley Audubon Chapters. Visit the newly opened trail along the North Shore of Lake Apopka boasting most species seen in Florida during the Christmas Bird Count.
- Play a part in setting Audubon Florida's annual conservation agenda.
- Network with chapter leaders, staff, and conservation professionals from around the state.
- And much, much more!

