



SUMMER 2008

Florida Naturalist

2008 AUDUBON ASSEMBLY

Saving Birds in a
Changing Environment
October 24-25 in
Beautiful Crystal River



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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

The climate is changing. Humans are the cause. It's time to move beyond the debate and hold these truths as self evident.

I say this with complete certainty for two reasons: the science, collected from around the world and over time, is well past refutable; and more than 80% of plant and animal species studied thus far have shown changes in the timing of migration or reproduction, shifts in habitat or migratory routes, or other changes associated with climate change. Specifically, several North American warbler species have shifted northward more than 65 miles. On Michigan's Upper Peninsula, 15 species—including the rose-breasted grosbeak and black-throated blue warbler—are arriving up to 21 days earlier than in the 1960s.

The only questions that still remain are: just how bad will the effects of climate change be, and will we, as stewards of the planet, rise up and stem the tide of what may be the most planet-altering event since the last ice age?

Which is why I hope you will be there when we join together on October 24 at the Audubon Assembly in Crystal River. The theme this year is "Saving Birds in a Changing Environment." In addition to cooperatively establishing our 2009 Conservation Action Agenda on Conserving Energy, Preserving Land, Saving Water, Managing Growth, and Protecting Wildlife, we'll also look at how we can integrate solutions and adaptations in each of these areas to help mitigate climate change.

Guest speakers from here in Florida, as well as the National Audubon Society, will help us understand the challenges we face as a people, and advocate in support of policies that protect our precious natural resources.

This year, for the first time ever, we will hold the Assembly at a dedicated eco-friendly hotel, the Plantation Golf Resort and Spa. A member of the Green Hotels Association, the Plantation Inn is right in the middle of one of the most beautiful parts of Florida. We can all look forward to outstanding birding opportunities and field trips courtesy of Citrus and Hernando Audubon societies.

Please join me at this year's Assembly. The climate is changing and those changes are impacting birds, wildlife and nature. Because humans are the cause, together we can solve it. That is good news.

See you there.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David E. Anderson".

David E. Anderson
Executive Director, Audubon of Florida



Everglades Restoration Evolves as Historic U.S. Sugar Land Deal Moves Forward

Photo courtesy of R. J. Wiley, map by Laurie Freeman-Gray

The acquisition of agricultural lands south of Lake Okeechobee offers the extraordinary opportunity to store and treat water, and reestablish an historical path of water flows from the lake through the southern Everglades to Florida Bay.

In late June, Governor Charlie Crist, South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) Governing Board Vice-Chair Shannon Estenoz, and U.S. Sugar CEO Robert Buker announced a plan whereby the SFWMD will acquire approximately 187,000 acres of U.S. Sugar's land for about \$1.75 billion. A sugar mill, citrus processing plant, and 200 miles of railroad are part of the transaction. U.S. Sugar will retain possession and use rights of the property for six years, and may continue its operations during that period.

Following the announcement, the SFWMD's governing board voted unanimously to ratify a "statement of principles" that will steer negotiations of the monumental land acquisition to a conclusion. Audubon commends the SFWMD and U.S. Sugar for moving ahead, and looks forward to participating to ensure that the enterprise achieves maximum benefits for the environment.

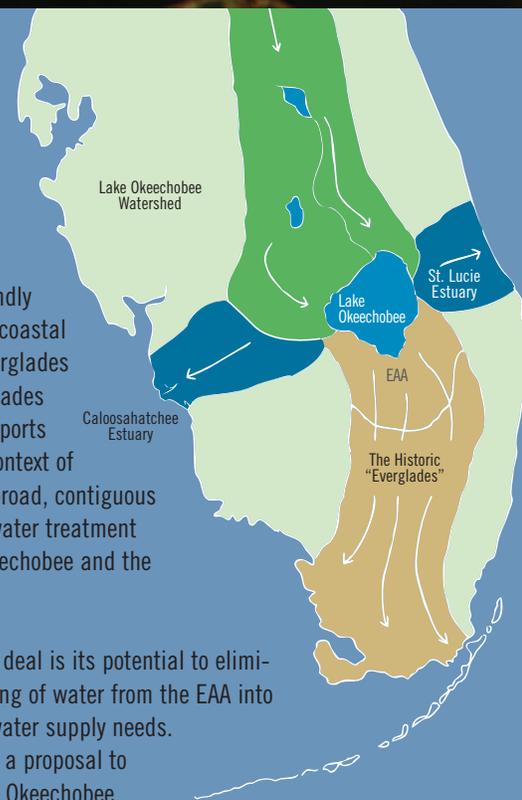
As SFWMD staff begins negotiating terms for the purchase, the price tag could vary slightly once detailed appraisals, surveys, and environmental assessments are conducted. The governing board already voted to fund \$5 million for the appraisal process and first phase of negotiations. The remaining financing for the purchase will come from cash, Certificates of Participation, and some reallocation of SFWMD revenue already identified for Everglades restoration.

Long considered by conservationists as a vital missing link in Everglades restoration, the acquisition of this land will provide new opportunities for water storage and water quality treatment. Restoration in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) should also reduce the need for harmful discharges of farm runoff into the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries.

Management of land and water in this region profoundly impacts Lake Okeechobee, coastal estuaries, the southern Everglades and Florida Bay, and the Glades communities. Audubon supports some land trading in the context of this acquisition to form a broad, contiguous network of reservoirs and water treatment marshes between Lake Okeechobee and the remaining Everglades.

A major benefit of the land deal is its potential to eliminate or reduce back-pumping of water from the EAA into Lake Okeechobee to meet water supply needs. Last year Audubon stopped a proposal to pump water back into Lake Okeechobee, because doing so can significantly degrade water quality. Some interests continue to advocate for reintroduction of the practice, however.

In coming months, Audubon will collaborate with all the involved parties to ensure that this historic purchase delivers the greatest possible benefit to the environment, and lives up to its potential as a major turning point for Everglades restoration. When wise use of this land and water bring back the abundant native birds and other wildlife that historically populated the Everglades, Audubon will have helped to realize a momentous goal.



AUDUBON CELEBRATES LEGISLATIVE SUCCESS

Audubon's major goals for 2008 were passed by the Florida Legislature and signed into law by Governor Charlie Crist. Florida Forever and Everglades funding were extended by ten years, providing continued, if reduced, funding in a cash-strapped year. An energy bill contains one of Audubon's top priorities—a requirement that electric power utilities work with their customers to reduce demand through conservation and efficiency. An important bill will cause Broward, Miami-Dade, and Palm Beach counties to clean up and then end the pumping of partially-treated sewage effluent into the ocean. A long-sought Audubon priority passed—the enforcement of penalties for damaging seagrass beds—but was vetoed by Gov. Crist because of an offensive late-filed amendment. Most bills that would have weakened growth management died, but in a stunningly vindictive action, House leaders punished the Department of Community Affairs by cutting key planning staff.

Good and Generally-Good Conservation Bills that Passed

SB 542 Florida Forever by Sen. Burt Saunders of Naples extends the state's premier land-buying program by \$300 million per year for ten more years. Audubon worked with allies to secure new funds for working ranch and timber lands, and to put new emphasis on managing public lands for imperiled species.

SB 1094 Clean Oceans Act by Sen. Mike Haridopolous of Brevard County forces gambling vessels to treat, rather than dump, their onboard sewage.

SB 1302 Leah Schad Memorial Ocean Outfall Program by Sen. Burt Saunders. Named for the late Leah Schad, a longtime Audubon leader, this bill bans new ocean outfalls and requires existing outfalls to use advanced treatment and ultimately to reuse wastewater in Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties.

SB 1552 Everglades and Florida Keys Wastewater Bonds by Sen. Burt Saunders extends for ten years up to \$150 million a year in bonds to generate funds for Everglades restoration and the overdue Florida Keys wastewater program.

HB 7059 Seagrass Protection and Seagrass Mitigation Banks by Rep. Stan Mayfield. A last minute amendment to let the Cabinet allow seagrass mitigation banks on sovereign lands was opposed by Audubon and led to the bill's veto. A long-sought goal of enforcing against boaters who harm seagrass was lost in the process.

HB 7135 Energy A top Audubon priority was achieved in this bill, which requires electric power utilities to work with customers to reduce demand through conservation and efficiency. The bill also had Gov. Crist's top priority—endorsement of a state cap and trade program for greenhouse gases. Audubon worked hard to minimize the environmental effect of new transmission line language.

Audubon Is Grateful to These True Environmental Champions

Burt Saunders Hardworking sponsor of every major green bill—kept them clean.

Paula Dockery Perennial champion of water and public lands—fought bad ideas.

Ken Pruitt Senate president—made the Everglades a priority and stopped bad bills.

And we thank some hardworking and courageous newcomers—Representatives

Scott Randolph, Rick Kriseman and Tony Sasso. They give us hope.

2009 Legislative Lobbying Already Underway

Audubon is making management of bird and wildlife habitat on state lands a priority for 2009. Too many critical habitats are falling into decline because state leaders fail to use existing authority to protect wildlife. You can help turn the tide:

- Attend the Audubon Assembly October 24-25 in Crystal River
- Sign up for the free online Advocacy newsletter at www.audubonofflorida.org.



Redwing blackbirds by R. J. Wiley

THANK YOU...

The Audubon legislative team is especially grateful to the actively-participating subscribers to the Florida Conservation Network, and ever-more-active chapter conservation leaders. Their messages to legislators helped to shift the tide on several issues. Audubon's grassroots leaders' work with the professional legislative team informed and backed up strategies on a number of key issues.

You can influence Florida's environmental policies by working with your chapter's conservation committee or by joining Audubon's online Florida Conservation Network at www.audubonofflorida.org. Click on the "take action" button at the top of the homepage.

GRASSROOTS ACTION IS THE KEY to meaningful seagrass protections

Not far from this year's Assembly venue is the Big Bend Seagrasses Aquatic Preserve, encompassing 945,000 acres of nearshore waters along 150 miles of coastline. Its status as a preserve suggests that seagrasses enjoy special protections but, in fact, current laws leave them vulnerable to propeller scarring even in state aquatic preserves.

Seagrass meadows are nurseries and foraging grounds for recreationally-important and commercially-harvested species including shrimp, stone crab, spiny lobster, yellowtail snapper, gray snapper, and blue crab. These plants shelter and feed rare species such as manatees and sea turtles, and they anchor a food web that supports reddish egrets, roseate spoonbills, and other signature Florida birds. The apparently pastoral meadows of seagrass in Florida's shallow coastal waters are the engine behind a complex web of life and death, prey and predator. In addition to nurturing an ecosystem, seagrasses oxygenate and purify the water, and their roots stabilize the bottom.



Reddish egret by Christina Evans

Permitted dredge-and-fill activities and changes in water quality have taken a toll on Florida's seagrasses, as have rampant scarring and destruction of seagrass beds by boats and personal watercraft. Over a decade ago, state researchers identified more than 173,000 acres of Florida's seagrasses that had suffered significant scarring from propellers and groundings. In seconds, propellers and vessel hulls can destroy not just blades of seagrass, but roots as well. Regeneration, if it occurs at all, can take years.

Recognizing the magnitude of threats facing seagrasses, Audubon's science staff collaborated with other agency and academic experts to draft legislation creating penalties for seagrass scarring. For several years, this draft legislation failed to gain traction in Tallahassee, but during the 2008 Legislative Session, more modest protections finally passed as HB 7059 with amendments. Unfortunately, one late-filed amendment regarding seagrass mitigation banking aroused concern among some in the environmental community, and Governor Crist ultimately vetoed the bill at their request.

While penalties for seagrass scarring sank with this veto, the attention the action generated gave Audubon a platform to call for even greater protections for this resource. These include penalties for scarring not only within aquatic preserves, but in all state waters, and call for greater rigor in mitigation of seagrass impacts, and for consideration of seagrasses in decisions about water quality and flows.

Leadership and insight from chapters—including Pelican Island, St. Petersburg, Peace River, Southwest Florida and Hernando Audubons—helped craft this strategy. Your input, photos and stories from the field are still needed to build the case for next year. Audubon of Florida looks forward to continuing this work with its chapters next session, and to getting meaningful seagrass legislation passed.

GET INVOLVED. Join Audubon's Florida Conservation Network to make sure you are notified next session, when Audubon will need your help to pass meaningful seagrass legislation. www.audubonaction.org/florida

LEARN MORE. Read Audubon's letter to Governor Crist on the need for seagrass protections in the Letters and Testimony Archive at www.audubonofflorida.org

Landowners and conservationists collaborate to **PROTECT FLORIDA PANTHER HABITAT**

Cooperation and trust among conservation groups and landowners in eastern Collier County has led to an innovative plan to benefit the endangered Florida panther, while balancing environmental and economic concerns. The Florida Panther Protection Program, announced in June, will identify a vast, contiguous range of panther habitat for protection. The program



Florida panther by R. J. Wiley

The hoped-for conservation pact between landowners and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would align Collier County's panther conservation and recovery goals with state and federal programs. Partnering conservation organizations are Audubon of Florida, Collier County Audubon Society, Inc., Defenders of Wildlife, and Florida Wildlife Federation. Cooperating landowners are Alico Land Development Corporation, Barron Collier Partnership, Collier Enterprises, Consolidated Citrus LP, English Brothers, Half Circle L Ranch Partnership, Pacific Tomato Growers Ltd., and Suniland Family Limited Partnership.

The Florida Panther Protection Program calls for the creation of a North Corridor and the maintenance and enhancement of a South Corridor for the panther through the 200,000-acre Rural Land Stewardship Area in eastern Collier County. It seeks to enable protection of contiguous panther habitat from the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge and the Big Cypress National Preserve on the south, to the Caloosahatchee River on the north, to Corkscrew Marsh and beyond Camp Keais Strand on the west, and beyond the Okaloacoochee Slough on the east—potentially providing habitat connectivity within approximately 2,500,000 acres of public and private land.

will also set up a \$150 million fund for conservation measures such as acquiring, restoring, buffering and enhancing habitat. The fund will be named in honor of the late Paul Marinelli, whose vision of habitat stewardship and cooperation among different interests led to the creation of the program.

Official estimates put Florida's wild panther population at between 80 and 100 cats, with loss of habitat and road kill among the top threats to their survival. Audubon and other conservation groups worked with panther biologists and habitat mappers for more than a year to lay the groundwork for the plan.

The hoped-for conservation

JOIN Audubon of Florida's **Climate Action Network**

Audubon and its electronic network of advocates are working to put America and Florida firmly on the path to an energy future that is environmentally secure, economically sound, and reliable.

Audubon has teamed up with the Alliance for Climate Protection to promote the campaign "We Can Solve the Climate Crisis," and is collaborating with the Energy Foundation to work toward clean energy policies in Florida and nationally. Audubon is also working with Environmental Defense and other partners for enactment of a strong national cap and trade policy to reduce global warming pollution.

Join the Climate Action Network to help achieve the transition to a healthy environment for birds, wildlife, land and water. Visit www.audubonofflorida.org and go to **Climate Action Network** at the bottom of the home page.



Photo by R. J. Wiley

Renewable Energy and Conservation: CLEAN WAYS TO BEAT CLIMATE CHANGE

The past year has been good for efforts in Florida to stimulate a transition from the use of polluting fossil fuels to supply electricity to clean renewable technologies and energy efficiency. And that is good news for Florida, its special natural areas, and its abundant birds and wildlife.

In July Governor Charlie Crist signed HB 7135, a wide-ranging energy bill that promotes both renewable energy and energy efficiency, and conservation to reduce demand for electricity. The bill was signed at the Climate Summit where Florida Power & Light Company also announced plans (backed by Audubon) to install a total of 110 megawatts of solar energy at three facilities.

Audubon and its partners have been working to ensure that Florida makes smart, responsible energy choices to reduce global warming pollution and stimulates development of new clean energy technologies and green jobs in the state. Some of the most exciting provisions in the new energy legislation will reduce barriers to widespread deployment of renewable energies. Positive provisions include net metering and interconnections: The energy bill, for the first time, sets up a system that allows customers to interconnect with the electricity grid to generate their own clean electricity through solar power and sell what is not used back to the grid. This is

good news for everyone interested in installing renewable, clean energy systems and contributing to breaking our dependence on gas, coal and oil as electricity-generating sources.

Renewable Portfolio Standard: The energy bill directs the Florida Public Service Commission to establish rules for a renewable portfolio standard that would require energy providers to ensure that a percentage of the electricity they sell is generated using clean energy technologies. Audubon is working to ensure that the standard sets a mandatory goal of 20 percent clean renewable power by 2020. This would significantly contribute to reducing the state's global warming pollution, would stimulate growth in solar and other renewable technologies, provide the economic stimulus of new green jobs, and reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

Audubon will provide expert testimony to the Florida Public Service Commission on rules to implement the renewable standard. The Commission will present its draft rules for a renewable portfolio standard to the Legislature by February 2009. Leading up to this deadline, Audubon will, with your help, work to ensure that clean, green energy technologies receive the incentives they need to succeed.

2008 AUDUBON ASSEMBLY in beautiful Crystal River, FL October 24-25



Photo courtesy of Plantation Golf Resort & Spa

Please join us for the 2008 Audubon Assembly at the stately Plantation Golf Resort & Spa on the banks of the Crystal River on Florida's Nature Coast. The Audubon Assembly brings together Audubon leaders and members from all over Florida to socialize, enjoy nature, and set Florida's conservation agenda. The theme of this year's Assembly is "Saving Birds in a Changing Environment," and will feature thought-provoking workshops exploring the impact human activities are having on Florida's birds and their habitats.

The Assembly starts with a welcome luncheon on Friday, October 24, and concludes with a farewell luncheon and send-off on Saturday. For those who come early, Citrus County Audubon has arranged a natural history cruise on the pristine Crystal River, and Hernando Audubon is sponsoring a program by photographer Thomas Dunkerton, famous for his digiscoped images of the area's birds.

There are 11 Great Florida Birding Trail areas within a 10-mile radius of the Inn. There are also thousands of acres of public land nearby along the Gulf Coast teeming with wildlife, including the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge, and the Withlacoochee State Forest.

Two hundred people are expected at this year's Assembly, so make plans and **REGISTER EARLY.**

Register for the Assembly online.

Book hotel separately.

Conference costs are underwritten by Audubon of Florida to keep your cost to a minimum. That is why the **all-inclusive Assembly package of programs, workshops, receptions, meals, and field trips is only \$115/person through September 23.** After 9/23/08, registration is \$125/person. The Friday reception/awards banquet is open to the public at \$40/per person, with reservations due by Oct. 17.

(This event is already included in the full registration package.)

To register online, visit www.audubonofflorida.org. If you prefer to pay by check, contact Lisa Reichert to request a registration form: 305-371-6399 ext. 120 or lreichert@audubon.org.

And think about carpooling to Crystal River.

The Plantation Golf Resort & Spa

a Certified Green Lodging Establishment

This idyllic resort features golf, miles of water to explore, guided swims with manatees, tennis courts, great food and super comfy rooms. It's also officially certified by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection as an Eco-Friendly Resort that goes beyond the call of duty to conserve energy and protect its beautiful surroundings.

Book your room before September 23 to receive the **special Audubon Assembly rate of \$102/night.** Ask for that rate when you call 800-632-6262 or visit www.plantationinn.com. Rooms booked after the 23rd will be charged at standard rates. No exceptions. And please remember that you need to book your room separately from registering for the Assembly.

RESERVE NOW

A FEW GOOD REASONS

you should come to the 2008 Assembly in beautiful Crystal River, FL October 24-25

- You'll help shape Audubon of Florida's 2009 Regional and State Conservation Priorities.
- You'll receive a top-notch primer on climate change.
- The birding promises to be exceptional.
- You'll experience the excellent company of folks from 44 Florida Audubon chapters.
- The price is mighty reasonable.
- It could be your best shot at seeing a red-cockaded woodpecker.

SCHEDULE

Friday, October 24

- Noon Welcome Luncheon - David Anderson, *Executive Director, Audubon of Florida* and John Ogden, *Audubon of Florida Director of Bird Conservation: "Our Passion for Birds and the Places They Live"*
- 1:30 p.m. LEARNING SESSIONS #1
- Upland Habitats – *Competition for the high-ground: can wildlife win?*
- Florida's Springs, Lakes and Rivers – *Keeping the balance; birds and people depend on our freshwater systems.*
- Break Networking and Nourishment
- 3:30 p.m. LEARNING SESSIONS #2
- Estuaries – *Rising tides are changing Florida's coastal ecosystems. Can they adapt?*
- Wetlands – *Revisiting "no net loss." We can't afford to lose more wetlands.*
- 6:00 - 7:00 p.m. Social – *Birders dip their beaks.*
- 7:00 p.m. Dinner: *Celebrating Success and Recognizing Accomplishments*
Keynote speaker – Florida Governor Charlie Crist (*invited*)

Saturday, Oct. 25

- 6:00-8:00 a.m. Breakfast buffet
- 6:30 - 8:45 a.m. Field trip #1 - Greet the dawn with the red-cockaded woodpecker at the Chassahowitzka Wildlife management area. (*led by Citrus County Audubon*)
- 7:00-11:30 a.m. Field trip #2 - Optional outing to the Ecowalk at Crystal River State Buffer Preserve for folks who opt out of the morning sessions. (*led by Citrus County Audubon*)
- 8:00 a.m. LEARNING SESSION #3
- Magical Partnerships – *Creative alliances can protect larger landscapes and their wildlife.*
- Coastal Habitats – *Saving life on the margin: Developing a plan for abundant birdlife on Florida's shores.*
- 10:00 a.m. Audubon's Regional and State Conservation Priorities – *Setting the Agenda for 2009*
- 11:00 a.m. Climate Change, the epic issue of our time. How to meet the challenge of adapting Florida's ecosystems while working to protect wildlife, conserve water resources, preserve public lands, support clean energy and defend growth management.
- Noon Lunch – *Celebrating Audubon Chapters*

Come Early – Stay Late

For details visit www.audubonofflorida.org

All activities will meet at or depart from the hotel.

Thursday, October 23

3:00 - 5:00 p.m. – Board the boat for a Natural History tour with Captain Galen Clymer on the Crystal River.

6:00 - 7:30 p.m. – Gather by the pool overlooking the Crystal River for the Assembly Pizza Party.

8:00 - 9:30 p.m. – Join the Hernando Audubon Program for an evening of beautiful bird photos by renowned digi-scope photographer Thomas Dunkerton.

Friday morning, October 24

7:00 Sunrise to 8:45 a.m. – Travel to the shore for a digi-scoping workshop with expert Thomas Dunkerton. *Bring your camera or digi-scoping equipment.*

7:00 - 8:30 a.m. – Wander at your leisure on the Great Florida Birding Trail. *Find the Western Section guide in your registration package.*

7:00 - 11:00 a.m. – Visit the many habitats of the Fort Island Trail with experts from Citrus County Audubon.

9:00 - 11:30 a.m. – Join the Climate Action Advocacy Training with Julia Levine, *National Audubon Society Global Warming Campaign Director.*

Saturday afternoon, October 25

2:00 p.m. – Annual Florida Audubon Membership Meeting

3:00 p.m. – Book your kayaking adventure with local biologist Matt Clemons of Aardvark Florida Kayak Company after the farewell luncheon on Saturday. (*Bring your own kayak or rent one.*)

Photo courtesy of Plantation Golf Resort & Spa





Burrowing owls by R. J. Wiley

Saving Wild Florida, Saving Florida's Nature Coast

Few frontiers are left in Florida. What seemed endless in 1900 now is fragmented and tattered as Florida's population hits 18 million. Wilderness is now a fading memory. It is difficult—but not impossible—to find landscape-scale sections of natural Florida intact and mostly free from development. Those that still exist provide a link to the past, and a glimpse of what a sustainable future might hold if we have the grace and wisdom to protect our last wild places. Florida's Nature Coast is such a place.

Stretching along the Gulf Coast from just north of Tampa Bay to Apalachee Bay, the Nature Coast is one of the region's longest stretches of relatively-undeveloped coastline. Miles of seagrass beds, coastal marshes and hammocks, and coastal rivers define this stretch of coast. The Suwannee River, the Big Bend Seagrasses Aquatic Preserve, and several of Florida's most scenic national wildlife refuges are the wild heart of this place. In 1867 John Muir ended his 1,000-mile walk to the Gulf in Cedar Key. Artists, writers, outlaws, naturalists, and hardy fisherman and crackers have wandered the Nature Coast, a place rich in human and natural history.

Florida black bears still roam here, and the coastal wetlands and seagrass beds nurture marine life in the Gulf. Manatees and sea turtles can be found in coastal waters, and some of Florida's most amazing blackwater and spring-fed rivers flow into the Gulf along this stretch. Abundant resident and migratory birds make for spectacular birding here, where the power and magic of wild Florida are palpable.

Despite the vital ecological importance of the Nature Coast, the region faces daunting pressure from development and mining interests, energy and utility industries, road builders, and those who would repeat mistakes from Florida's past here. Sustainable ecotourism, essential to the economy of the Nature Coast, offers a real alternative to the slash and burn economic model.

Bulldozers stand at the gates of Eden, but Audubon activists from chapters up and down the Nature Coast have been working to protect wild areas. Chapters including West Pasco Audubon, Hernando Audubon, Citrus Audubon, Four Rivers Audubon, and Apalachee Audubon all have coordinated their efforts during the last year or so to speak up for the Nature Coast.

— Joe Murphy, Conservation Chair, Hernando Audubon Society

Awards Ceremony at Assembly Will Celebrate Chapters' Hard Work.

The outstanding work carried out by Audubon's stellar chapters and volunteers will be recognized on Saturday, October 25, during the awards luncheon at the Plantation Inn, Crystal River. The awards presentation will be an inspiring part of the stirring finale planned for this year's statewide gathering.

Award categories are: chapter of the year, best conservation project, best membership recruitment program, best education program, and best chapter exhibit at the current Assembly. Nominations and supporting materials must be received no later than **Monday, September 15, 2008**.

Nominate your chapter or another one—it's easy to do. Chapter officers already have details about the key factors by which entries are evaluated, and a list of required reports. For full guidelines, please contact Jacqui Sulek, Chapters Coordinator, Audubon of Florida / 2607 Callaway Road, Suite 103, Tallahassee, FL 32303 / Tel. 850-251-1297 / email: jsulek@audubon.org

SEE FOR YOURSELF

How Ecosystems Survive in a Changing Florida

Audubon's Ahhochee Hill Sanctuary, in partnership with the Hernando Audubon Society, has organized a two-day nature experience in and around Hernando County immediately prior to Audubon Assembly. Participants will see burrowing owls, scrub jays and red-cockaded woodpeckers in their uniquely different habitats. Land managers will explain the measures—sometimes extreme—they are taking to make sure these birds survive in a changing environment.

The October 22–23 special program (\$125/person) includes lodging, meals, and transportation while based in Brooksville. Program ends in time to make the 35-minute drive to the Plantation Golf Resort & Spa, where Audubon Assembly warm-up events get started later on Thursday, October 23. Space is limited, so contact canderberg@audubon.org for full details.

This special program is NOT part of Audubon Assembly. It was organized as a convenience for those traveling to Assembly who would like to learn more about the region's birds.

Black skimmers by Christina Evans





The Whooping Crane **Makes a Comeback**

Now in its eighth year, the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership's (WCEP) "Bringing Back the Crane" project continues to make international environmental history with its efforts to establish an eastern migratory flock of these endangered birds. "The goal will be considered successful when the flock consists of 125 birds with at least 25 mating pairs," said Pat Casselberry, Conservation Chair, Citrus County Audubon Society, one of many Audubon chapters that support WCEP.



In 1940 only 15 of the 65-inch-tall giants remained. The omnivorous birds live only in North America and require undisturbed wetland habitat, for both food and for protection while roosting.

Casselberry explained that the chicks pictured here hatched in captivity and began their training at the USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland. "While still in the egg, chicks are exposed to the sound of ultralight aircraft engines," she continued. When they hatch, they already are comfortable hearing the sound, while they imprint upon whooping crane puppet heads controlled by costumed humans. At this stage, chicks get ground training in foraging for food and wing flapping.

Two-month-old chicks are crated and flown to Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Wisconsin where they learn to follow ultralights as surrogate parents. In autumn, when young juveniles are strong enough to fly longer distances, the migration of 1,200-plus miles begins.

This journey is anything but a normal migration. A large support crew in cars, trucks, vans, motor homes, and trailers accompanies these endangered birds. A Cessna aircraft scouts ahead of the ultralights and keeps tabs on straying juveniles. Southward journeys can take 48 to 76 days, depending on weather conditions.

Since its inception, the WCEP migration team has led these experimental flocks to the Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge in Citrus County, a spot chosen because it provides the necessary habitat.

The birds spend the winter months learning to live in the wild as wildlife specialists monitor their progress. In the spring the birds fly north unassisted by ultralights, returning to the Necedah NWR area. Some of the older birds have formed pairs, built nests, laid eggs and hatched young. This progress represents an important benchmark in attaining the goals set by WCEP. <http://www.bringbackthecranes.org/>.

Photos courtesy of The International Crane Foundation, Baraboo, Wisconsin



Juvenile wood storks by R. J. Wiley

WOOD STORKS, FORESTED WETLANDS, AND MELALEUCA

Audubon has been working diligently to raise awareness of the importance of wetland habitats, including forested and melaleuca-infested wetlands, to the overall life cycle of wood storks. In the Spring 2008 Florida Naturalist, a short article appeared that focused more attention on melaleuca-infested wetlands than on the importance of forested wetlands to this special species, and did not capture the nuances and complexity of the scientific studies and findings on wood stork habitats.

For clarity and accuracy, the upshot is:

- Most wood stork research has been on colony sites and open graminoid marsh foraging locations. Forested wetlands have been largely ignored.
- Recent accounts demonstrate that storks use forested wetlands much more than previously believed.
- Forested wetlands contribute to stork prey productivity and direct foraging.
- The literature bias against forested wetlands is reflected in how permitting agencies regulate development, and mitigate wood stork impacts.
- While melaleuca is an undesirable invasive exotic tree, it still contributes to storks by supporting their prey base.
- Biological controls released to combat melaleuca have been very effective.

- Audubon supports ongoing efforts to reduce the impacts and extent of melaleuca.

Perhaps Dr. Ken Meyer, Director of Avian Research and Conservation Institute, said it best when he remarked that “we’ve missed the boat for a long time by focusing [stork] habitat studies on the colony sites and the open graminoid marshes where they happen to be visible. We’ve ignored the role of forested wetlands, primarily, cypress dominated mixed-species forests,” in part because the dense crown cover makes it more difficult to detect wood storks.

While wood storks have been documented foraging in dense melaleuca, diverse native forested wetlands are far more desirable than melaleuca invaded forests. Meyer and others referenced in the Naturalist article were sharing accounts of storks using native (not melaleuca forested) wetlands.

In light of recent research findings, permitting agencies should recognize the full value of all forested wetlands to wood storks, even those partially degraded by melaleuca invasion.

CORKSCREW SWAMP SANCTUARY GHOST ORCHID BLOOMS AGAIN



One of the rarest flowers on earth is making a repeat appearance at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. "The fact that the flower is alive and here is almost a miracle," said photographer R. J. Wiley, who has made a study of the leafless ghost orchid that is now visible from the boardwalk at Corkscrew. "There are no more of them. When they're gone, they're gone, and this is an old Florida orchid too. So this is a very special find."

Sanctuary staff member Sally Stein noted that the endangered orchid species exists only in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and South Florida. "It may bloom again next summer or it may never bloom again," Stein said. The Sanctuary expects thousands to visit this summer for a glimpse of the white blooms, safely up high on a tree surrounded by water.

Ghost orchid by R. J. Wiley taken in July 2008.

CORKSCREW NATURE STORE IS NOW ONLINE

www.corkscrewnaturestore.org

Corkscrew Nature Store's treasure trove of nature-related items is available for purchase online. For a great selection of Florida field guides, books, apparel, birding gear, optics, toys and much more, visit www.corkscrewnaturestore.org. Best sellers include notecards and photographic prints of the now-legendary ghost orchid, captured by photographer R. J. Wiley from Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary's boardwalk. A selection of Nature Store merchandise will also be offered October 24-25 at Audubon Assembly in Crystal River for participants' convenience. "Check the online Nature Store often," urges store manager Mary Short, "because we are constantly adding new merchandise."

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.



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IN MEMORIAM Dorothy Blair

“The environment and its preservation were big parts of Dorothy Blair’s life,” said Ed Carlson, director of Audubon’s Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. “Her love for nature and her love for Corkscrew are a legacy that we will continue to honor forever.” The Minnesota native and her late husband, John, moved to Naples in 1976. A longtime board member of The Conservancy of Southwest Florida, Dorothy Blair passed away in May. She was active with Audubon for more than 25 years, donating funds to construct the Blair Audubon Center at Corkscrew, the boardwalk, and other elements including a life-sized bronze sculpture of wood storks near the entrance. “Dorothy had a special place in her heart for wood storks,” said Carlson. “She was just such a wonderful presence.”



Photo by Jeanette Hobbs.

In June Mary Barley (left), an Everglades Foundation board member and resident of the Florida Keys, released a rehabilitated bald eagle at Curry Hammock State Park near Marathon. Removing a protective hood from the eagle’s head in preparation for its return to the wild is Kelly Grinter, wildlife rehabilitation expert with the Marathon Wild Bird Center. The injured bird was initially stabilized there before being transferred to Audubon’s Center for Birds of Prey for additional treatment.



Cardinal by Betsy S. Franz

Just as important as feeding birds is making sure they have fresh, clean water all year round. Especially during the dry season and in urban areas, water can be hard for our feathered friends to find.

WON'T YOU HELP US HELP THEM? THE ADOPT-A-BIRD PROGRAM NEEDS YOU.



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The Adopt-a-Bird program is an annual investment in the care, feeding, and medical treatment of birds brought to the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey for care, and for those permanently housed at the Center as part of community education programs. A basic-level adoption packet includes an introductory membership to Audubon, invitations to special events, a photo, adoption certificate. It also includes free admission to the Center, so you can come visit the species you decide to support. For details call 407-644-0190, or check out the web site at http://www.audubonofflorida.org/who_centers_CBOP_adoptabird.html.

ADOPT-a-BIRD

Photo of Spike, a red-tailed hawk at the Center for Birds of Prey, by Susie Warren.

Audubon Welcomes Doug Machesney Major Gifts Officer, Southwest Florida

Audubon is pleased to welcome J. Douglas Machesney as Major Gifts Officer of Southwest Florida. "I look forward to the opportunity to continue Audubon's work of preservation and restoration of our environment, particularly the challenges facing Corkscrew and the Big Cypress region," said Machesney, whose office is at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. He was vice president of development for Concord College in Athens, West Virginia, for 16 years, after having held high-level positions in that state's education system. Now a consultant for the National Park Service, and a board member of Corkscrew Regional Ecosystem Watershed, Machesney and his wife, Carolyn, have been volunteer boardwalk naturalists at Corkscrew since 2002.

Eric Draper Honored by National Audubon

Eric Draper, Audubon of Florida's policy director was recognized for his 13 years of service and successful advocacy to protect birds and the environment with the 2008 Callison Award. Named for former National Audubon Society executive vice president Charles H. Callison, the award recognizes exceptional creativity, cooperation, persuasion, patience and perseverance in promoting the Audubon mission at the local, state, or federal level.

"In my opinion, Eric is the most influential environmental advocate in any state capital in the country, and has used grassroots advocates more effectively than anyone I have ever had the privilege to work with," said John Flicker, president of the National Audubon Society. Flicker presented the award in May at NAS's board meeting in Greenwich, Connecticut.

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Photo courtesy Plantation Golf Resort and Spa

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING
of the membership of The Florida Audubon Society.

Pursuant to the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws, notice is hereby given that the Annual Membership Meeting of the Florida Audubon Society will be held at the Plantation Golf Resort and Spa, Crystal River, Florida, at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, October 25, 2008, in conjunction with the annual Assembly of Audubon of Florida being held there October 24-25, 2008. The meeting agenda will be to receive a financial report and hear any comments of the membership to the Board of Directors. A Meeting of the Board will follow immediately upon the conclusion of the Membership Meeting.

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OCTOBER 24-25, 2008

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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.*



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