



Audubon FLORIDA Naturalist

SUMMER 2013

*Boots On The Ground
For Conservation*

Photo by R. J. Wiley

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Volunteer and Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary Board Member Ralph Arwood helps with a prescribed fire used to maintain healthy native habitats at the 13,000 acre sanctuary.

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Photo by Mary Short



*John Elting, Chairman,
Florida Audubon Society*

Chapters Help Us Expand Our Boots on the Ground

The Chairman's Report is not always an easy report to write. Florida is a big state and Audubon Florida is involved in countless projects from Florida Bay to the Panhandle and the Atlantic to the Gulf of Mexico. In keeping with our mandate, a very bright and devoted staff works tirelessly on conservation issues and environmental tasks.

In the world of Audubon nothing remains dormant. Challenges are always forthcoming and unending. So, how do we cope? How do we succeed? What makes Audubon Florida so successful that the U.S Senate Commerce Committee asks our executive director to come to Washington to testify not simply on behalf of Audubon Florida but on behalf of all our conservation partners in the state? First of course is our talented and dedicated staff who drive remarkable conservation results for the Greater Everglades Ecosystem, coastal and threatened bird habitats, and Florida's special places. But equally important and critical to our mission are our 35,000 members and volunteers who make up 44 chapters in the seven regions of our state. Chapter leaders, members, and volunteers are our boots on the ground, our eyes and ears, our ambassadors, our centurions, our citizen scientists, our center volunteers. That's what makes Audubon Florida so special and so successful. That's what makes Audubon Florida's scientific data so valuable to state and federal agencies. That's what makes our advocacy so credible and, that's what makes our influence so persuasive.

Chapters are coming together with other conservation partners to restore the Indian River Lagoon, protect springs in North Central Florida, change shallow wetlands policies in Southwest Florida, assure BP Oil penalties provide environmental benefits along the Gulf Coast, and make sure Florida's coastal bird nesting and migratory stopovers are protected areas. The examples are endless.

So, to continue to grow Audubon Florida as an organization and to expand its grass roots influence we need not only the devoted efforts of our volunteers but also funding. Sorry, we can't get along without it. To meet Florida's growing conservation challenges, we must greatly expand our financial capacity. But the one thing I can say to all of you is that for every dollar you donate, you'll get maximum return thanks to Audubon Florida's chapters, members, and volunteers.

Thank you,

John Elting
Chairman, Florida Audubon Society

During the June Florida Audubon Society Board meeting in Ponte Vedra, board members and guests celebrated the fifth anniversary of the Northeast Florida Office. The group toured Huguenot Memorial Park to see the remarkable difference that the ban on driving on one portion of the beach, advocated by Audubon, has made to the success of coastal bird nesting. This is just one of many conservation outcomes staff, chapter members and volunteers have seen over the last five years. To see a full copy of the five-year anniversary report go to <http://bit.ly/1bG9ze0>.



Photo by George Willson

Learn more at www.AudubonBootsOn.org

Audubon Volunteers are Priceless



While on a field trip last month with leaders of Duval Audubon Society, I asked one of my companions how she became involved. Debra Hill, an attorney, started volunteering as a coastal bird steward at Huguenot Memorial Park. Now she is one of the chapter's leaders. The time and expertise provided by Audubon volunteers is essential to conservation; in fact, the nonprofit publication Independent Sector calculates that each volunteer hour in Florida is worth \$18.85, and many government agencies value our volunteers' time at higher rates, because of their skill and sophistication. In reality, Debra's work is invaluable and she is just one of an army giving time to help accomplish Audubon's goal of restoring birdlife to Florida's special places.

We dedicate this issue of the Audubon Florida Naturalist to the Debras of Florida, and we invite you to celebrate their dedication, service and successes at the Audubon Assembly this October 25-26 in Palm Harbor. EagleWatchers, Jay Watchers, Coastal Bird Stewards, Colony Watchers, Sanctuary Docents, board and chapter leaders, grassroots advocates and so many more: they are, and you are, the boots on the ground of Florida conservation.

In the following pages, we share stories of how our online Conservation Network volunteers, 20,000 strong, engaged legislators to stop bad bills and fund Florida Forever and Everglades Restoration.

We share more stories of volunteers in the field - citizen scientists and stewards who are monitoring 33 coastal bird nesting areas, 25 Florida Scrub-Jay sites, 15 wading bird colonies, 275 eagle nests, and other Important Bird Areas throughout Florida. These boots on the ground are the front lines, from the Panhandle to the Florida Keys, making sure that we don't lose through neglect what we fought so hard to protect. And Florida's 44 local Audubon chapters are leading the charge in local communities to educate and advocate for water and wildlife.

Volunteers started Audubon's movement in Florida in the early 1900s – stopping the plume hunters from devastating wading bird populations in the Everglades. Next, people came together at Corkscrew Swamp to save the last old growth cypress forest and the nation's largest Wood Stork rookery from being clear-cut. Equally inspiring is the 1979 story of Doris Mager, who spent days perched in an eagle's nest to raise awareness and money to start the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey.

This legacy of volunteerism is stronger today than ever. Now Audubon volunteers range from 9 year-old Cassidy Camera who raised \$300 for the Center for Birds of Prey to corporate work day participants to ranchers who protect and enhance habitats on their land.

To tell the story of every volunteer would take volumes. Please share your stories about your own boots on the ground experiences or those of a volunteer you admire on Facebook at facebook.com/AudubonFlorida or by email to flconservation@audubon.org.

We hope these examples inspire you to make a gift of time or leadership to continue and grow our proud tradition of activism. Whether your interests lie with education, science, advocacy or leadership, your skills are needed. Get inspired, get on your boots and get to work with Audubon!

Gratefully yours,

Eric Draper
Executive Director

AmeriCorps volunteers treating exotic Brazilian pepper at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary's Panther Island. Pictured left to right: Jonathan Beltran, Alice Lopes, Julien Hill, Amanda Gamaldi, Kenneth Smith, Nicholas Snow, Brendyn Luther, and Mady Willden. Photo by Allyson Webb



Boots on the Ground Advocates: The Voice of Conservation

A legislator pulled me aside before a committee meeting to say that his smart phone had lit up like a pinball machine when Audubon's advocacy network started pouring in emails in opposition to a proposed bill. While emails by themselves don't win campaigns, they are an important part of making sure that policymakers know that people are watching and care.

In the case of the legislator who got 1600 emails, Audubon's Legislative Director Mary Jean Yon had already met with him, so he knew the issues and where we stood. But the emails helped him see that people in his district and all over the state also knew. Audubon also mobilized people to come to Tallahassee during the Everglades lobby day and helped connect people in legislative districts to their elected representatives.

Another way Audubon Advocates are moving the agenda is circulating petitions to place an amendment on the ballot in 2014 that will dedicate 1/3 of the documentary stamp tax to environmental purposes. If successful the amendment will generate more than \$500 million each year for land preservation and management, clean water and Everglades restoration. That's some impressive boots on the ground.

Here is another great example. During the session a bill to allow oil and gas drilling in the beautiful Blackwater River State Forest garnered significant opposition from people throughout Florida who were horrified to think that Florida's public lands would become oilfields. One person used a social media site to drive opposition and leaders of the Francis Weston Audubon Society in Pensacola produced records of bird nesting in the area. The citizen science gave Audubon credibility in our arguments and inspired chapter members to fight the proposal. The response was so quick and resounding the sponsor withdrew the bill before it was ever heard in committee.



Download, complete and send the Florida Water and Legacy petition by requesting a copy through the Audubon FL portal <http://4fla.org/AudubonFL>

Online advocacy also helped create support for funding for the Everglades and Florida Forever, strip a bad provision from the Everglades Forever Act, and stop legislation that would legalize the practice of establishing feral cat colonies in public spaces. In one online campaign Audubon advocates generated 31,000 emails and phone calls to the members of just one committee. That is the reach of Audubon's Conservation Network which keeps 20,000 subscribers informed and provides easy tools to communicate with elected officials.

Working with Audubon in other Gulf States the Audubon network has generated thousands of comments demanding that BP be fined under the Clean Water Act for the oil spill and that those fines be used for Gulf restoration. Audubon's Gulf Coast Chapters also helped identify and nominate sites for restoration projects and scores of Audubon members turned out for public hearings throughout the state.

At the local level, Audubon Advocates continue to make a difference in front of regulatory agencies and local elected commissions on immediate conservation decisions, as well as shifting community and agency thinking for the long-term.

Audubon Florida and South Florida chapters coordinated on improving the proposed regulatory protections for water in Biscayne Bay. As a result of these efforts, the South Florida Water Management District has agreed for the first time to further evaluate the impact of groundwater flows in Miami-Dade and Biscayne Bay through a water reservation.

RESTORE Funding Advocates



Chapter leaders and staff show up in force at the St. Petersburg RESTORE hearing. From left to right: Karen Fraley, Julie Wraithmell, Jeanne Dubi, Saskia Jane, Jacqui Sulek, Maureen Arnold, Barbara Sheen Todd, Alice Tenney, Janica Johnson, Judi Hopkins, Mark Rachal, Dave Kandz, John Hood, Bob Keim, Irene Keim, Wanda Dean, Dave Howard

A special round of thanks goes to Bay County and Francis M. Weston Audubons, as well as members from Hernando, Manatee, Sarasota, Clearwater, St. Pete and Collier Audubons, for your presence, voices and energy at these important hearings for the Gulf!

Three years ago advocates in Northeast Florida won a hard-fought battle to end destructive beach driving at Ft. Matanzas National Monument. Last year, they continued their advocacy to enshrine the protection in the Monument's master plan, ensuring this will continue to be a safe place for beach-nesting birds. A recent letter to the *St. Augustine Record* calling for reopening beach driving was met with comments from readers supporting the ban. This shift in community opinion is a gratifying measure of the success of Audubon grassroots advocacy.

Thousands of comments helped persuade water management districts to limit the sale of conservation lands. And a recent campaign helped secure a vote in favor of a creative strategy to support ranchers in the Lake Okeechobee watershed who restore wetlands and create natural storage on their lands.

If you would like to become more engaged as an Audubon Advocate sign up at fl.audubon.org/signup to get the latest news online.



Jay Watch Citizen Science

“Here they come!” shouts a delighted volunteer. Three adult and two juvenile Florida Scrub-Jays swoop into view, scolding noisily, and perch atop the crown of a nearby scrub oak tree. These curious, blue and silver-gray birds, a federally threatened species under the Endangered Species Act, are found nowhere in the world except the Florida peninsula. Between 1993 and 2009, our state’s Florida Scrub-Jay population declined 26% on publicly managed lands. In addition, the scrub habitat that Florida Scrub-Jays require for survival continues to diminish significantly due to fire suppression policy and urban sprawl. Restoring and maintaining optimal scrub habitat conditions for the remaining Florida Scrub-Jays is a top priority for land managers and agency wildlife biologists – and Audubon Florida has joined the effort.

zen scientists that joined the statewide cadre of Jay Watch volunteers who will together invest more than 1100 hours surveying thousands of scrub acres at 25 parks and preserves spanning from Volusia to Martin County on the east coast, from Levy to Charlotte County on the west coast, and many points between. Jay Watch surveys teach volunteers about the fascinating behavior and biology of Florida Scrub-Jays and, in turn, these citizen scientists become advocates supporting conservation of these truly beautiful, priceless birds and the fragile scrub habitat that they call “home”.



Top: Jay Watch training at Duette Preserve, Manatee County, May 2013. Photo courtesy of: Manatee County Natural Resources Department.

Below: A juvenile Florida Scrub-Jay spotted during the survey at Catfish Creek in Polk County. Photo by R. Munguia



To help land managers assess the effects of habitat management actions such as prescribed burning on breeding success Audubon Florida’s dedicated Jay Watch volunteer citizen scientists spend blistering summer mornings from June 15 to July 15 searching treeless scrub oak habitat for groups of cooperatively-breeding Florida Scrub-Jays. The Jay Watch volunteers are trained to identify and document the number of adults and juveniles in each “family” group, record behavior, and mark family group locations on aerial maps. In alternate years, volunteers record vegetation metrics that quantify as scrub habitat. The Jay Watch survey results are analyzed by Audubon Florida’s Jay Watch Coordinator using Geographic Information Software and subsequently transmitted to land managers for use in planning next management actions.

This season, Audubon Florida and our partnering land managers trained 119 citi-

Chapters with members involved in Jay Watch

- Citrus County Audubon
- Lake Region Audubon
- Manatee County Audubon
- Marion County Audubon
- Martin County Audubon
- Orange Audubon
- Peace River Audubon
- St. Lucie Audubon
- Sarasota County Audubon
- Tampa Audubon
- West Volusia Audubon

Learn more at www.AudubonBootsOn.org



“I love learning about Scrub-Jay behavior. I deal with human behavior at work...birds are so much more interesting.

These are the gems that get people excited about birds/nature and especially the young people.”

-Dee Staley, St. Lucie County



“My Jay Watch experience led me to become an advocate for the Scrub-Jays and the little scrub habitat left.”

-Sandra Marraffino, Marion County



“What attracted me to Jay Watch was the nature of the program. Ecological conservation and citizen awareness are entwined. The program provides an opportunity to make a difference while meeting new people and enjoying our Florida preserves.”

-Tiffany Tommassini, Orange County

The Florida Scrub-Jay is a keystone species of the local ecosystem; their population is a direct indication of the health of the local habitats we enjoy. The Scrub-Jay program allows me to contribute to a good cause, while getting face-time with the species we seek to protect.

-Danley Tommassini, Orange County

Center for Birds of Prey



Swallowtail Kite
Photo by Reinier Munguia

“Volunteering at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey is such a rewarding experience. While doing my small part to help hawks, eagles, owls, kestrels and other birds of prey, I have learned so much not only about birds, but about Audubon’s mission. Center staff love to share their knowledge and passion with volunteers, and I have also become a docent at the Center (along with my other duties) to help pass this knowledge and passion along to our visitors. It is so much fun to guide both kids and adults through the Center and to help inspire and educate them about birds and wildlife.”

- Nancy Adler, Monday Volunteer
Clinic/Education Department

“Of course one of the most valued activities of volunteering at the center is being involved with the care and rehabilitation of these incredible birds, but it’s also very rewarding to spend time with our guests, hoping that we have elevated their appreciation and knowledge of Florida’s raptors so they feel empowered to make a difference.”

- Angela Bowman, Saturday Volunteer
Aviary/Education Department



Photo by Susie Warren

Volunteers are a core part of our workforce. They are our boots on the ground at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey. Some may look like tennis shoes or sneakers but boots none the less. The Center has about 80 active volunteers as part of the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey team. Another 250 plus volunteers are out in the field monitoring Florida’s Bald Eagles. These are boots that keep Audubon Center for Birds of Prey going. They are individuals that help with cleaning up aviaries (poop on our shoes), cutting up food (fish on our shoes), feeding our raptor residents, caring for our patients, folding laundry, rescu-

ing birds, educating the public, greeting guests and assisting with special events. With volunteers, our team is able to accomplish a tremendous amount of work. Each year over 140 volunteers contribute more than 12,000 hours of their time and talents to the Center. They are the faces out in our community sharing the mission and message of Audubon.

This spring, the Center hosted more than 800 guests at our annual Baby Owl Shower. Our volunteers helped welcome guests, collect in kind gifts and educate the public on the conservation of birds of prey. This successful event would not have been possible without the boots pictured here. Our volunteers come from all backgrounds and specialties and all have a love for birds of prey, conservation and the Center.

If you would like to know more about volunteering at the Center for Birds of Prey, email Beth Lott at blott@audubon.org.

Eagle Eyes On The Environment Brings New Technology and Programming to the Center

This spring, volunteers and donors helped launch the Center’s new Eagle Eyes on the Environment initiative. It would not have happened without major gifts from Duke Energy and Disney, as well tremendous support from Board Member Scott Taylor and volunteer Reinier Munguia. Many others donated to this project. Through the Eagle Eyes program, the Center is serving diverse audiences, linking to classrooms through technology, and engaging participants in learning and actions related to water, energy and habitat conservation. Using the iconic Bald Eagle as symbol for a healthy environment, programs are being hosted on site at Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in addition to outreach within the Central Florida community. The new initiative includes three key parts – 1) Video cameras in the Disney Magic of Flight Barn, which provides a live video feed allowing visitors within the Center, as well as students in the classroom, and technicians in the clinic to watch eagles under rehabilitation; 2) Additional programming to inspire guests and students to take conservation actions; and 3) Recruitment and implementation of EagleEyes Educators, a docent pool to provide more small group learning in the Center. To see a behind the scenes look into the flight barn and Bald Eagle rehabilitation go to acfbop.org or fl.audubon.org



Photo by Charles Lee

Eric Draper, Audubon Florida Exec. Director; Katie Warner, Center for Birds of Prey and Alex Glenn, Florida Area - State President at Duke Energy celebrate the launch of Eagle Eyes on the Environment.

EagleWatch

A Citizen Science Success Story

It's a cold morning at St. Marks National Wildlife refuge, but the eagles don't seem to mind. They're busy with home renovations, adding branches, pine needles and seaweed to an already sizable nest, and arranging them just so. The eagles have a lot invested in this nest – an eaglet is due any day now.

Bald Eagles have experienced an incredible recovery in Florida, and in the United States as a whole. From less than one hundred active nests in the mid 1970's, Florida can now claim almost 1500 nesting pairs, with new nests discovered every year. Audubon's EagleWatch program has for the last twenty years been in a unique position to witness this comeback, with volunteer citizen scientists throughout the state monitoring active eagle nests. EagleWatch volunteers play an important role in the continued success of the Bald Eagle in Florida by monitoring nest productivity, reporting possible disturbances to nesting, and educating their communities. More than 250 volunteer citizen scientists monitor approximately 275 active eagle nests in Florida, about 18% of the total population.

While the Bald Eagle's success in Florida is certainly something to celebrate, it is far from time to hang up the spotting scope. Eagles in Florida face many challenges, many of which are related to human development. As Florida's landscape continues to change, our wildlife is forced to adapt to an increasingly urban environment. Eagles have been making this transition by utilizing artificial structures such as cell towers for nesting. These types of changes in nesting behavior present management challenges that are much different than what eagles have faced in the past. Audubon EagleWatch is poised at the forefront of discussions to develop appropriate strategies that will best serve Florida's eagles, while building partnerships that will ensure the success of this treasured species far into the future.

Want to get involved?
Contact the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey at 407-644-0190, or email Matt Smith at: eaglewatch@audubon.org.



Francis the Bald Eagle, a true EagleWatch ambassador.



Top: The Neiberline family watching their eagle nest in northern Polk County. Eaglewatch data is being used by wildlife agencies to shape the Bald Eagle management plans.

Below: Jeannie Carrolls assisting in the rescue of an injured eagle in Haines City. She monitors three eagle nests in Winter Haven, Florida. Chapter members and other citizen scientists support EagleWatch throughout the state.



I came to the EagleWatch program in 2008 when I got a call from Lynda White the EagleWatch Coordinator at the time,



asking me to assist with a rescue of a young eagle. Since then I have seen many rescues, relocations and the most exciting of all, many releases. Today, I coordinate over 50 volunteers in collecting data about our nesting eagles; citizen scientists that provide valuable information on current threats and population dynamics. People with boots on the ground and watchful eyes, make a difference for the future of our national symbol.

-Reinier Munguia, Lakeland,
Polk County EagleWatch
Volunteer Coordinator

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary

Youth Education Volunteers and Much, Much More

Although living in the UK, with a career in Air Traffic Control, a chance visit to Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary nine years ago changed our lives. We saw an advertisement for the Florida Master Naturalist Program Wetlands Module, which grabbed our attention, so six months later we were back at Corkscrew, on the course.

We were soon volunteering for the Youth Education Team, taking 5th Graders on the Wild Florida Adventure. After a nervous start we have grown to love the program and now also take part in the 2nd Grade Insect Adventure.

Where did this lead? Well, basically, we'll do anything we're asked to do! We have been given excellent training in various roles at the swamp, some of which have proved quite challenging. Clearing areas of exotic plants, although hard work, has given us immense pleasure. It is also very rewarding to pass on our enthusiasm for Corkscrew to others as we guide them around the boardwalk, or even as we serve them coffee in the Tea Room.

Having the opportunity to volunteer at such an amazing sanctuary is both inspiring and captivating. We still live in the UK but have taken early retirement, enabling us to spend much more time at this wonderful place. Corkscrew and all its 'inhabitants' have caught our hearts.

-- Helen and Derek Day



Youth Education Team volunteers do what they do best at Corkscrew. Photo above: Derek Day. Photo below, left: Helen Day.

Helen and Derek Day are two great examples of the incredible volunteers at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary near Naples. Corkscrew could not operate without our over 150 active volunteers volunteering contributing 16,000 hours per year in roles such as Boardwalk Naturalists, Resource Management Specialists, and Youth Educators.

Youth educators guide young students, present many of them with their very first look at their environment – teaching important concepts such as habitat, interdependence and adaptation. Guiding rambunctious and diverse seven and ten year olds on explorations of upland pine forests, open wet prairie and the largest contiguous stand of virgin bald cypress in North America can be exhausting, but it is also very rewarding.

Boardwalk naturalists and educators are often delighted to spot the appearance of an unusual bird, reptile, insect or plant. In that role, in 2007, Helen and Derek discovered Corkscrew's unique blue Green Tree Frog (*Hyla cinerea*)! Other treats during the year include the first bloom of our rare Ghost Orchid, the arrival of our Painted Buntings, and the occasional sighting of a Florida Panther on the boardwalk. Volunteers wanting to participate in citizen science work join us for the Christmas Bird Count, Corkscrew Butterfly Census and the monthly Sanctuary Bird Census.

The beautiful Blair Center and Corkscrew's various offices provide a spot for volunteers wanting an indoor volunteer experience. The visitor center is often abuzz, especially during the winter season, with guests from all over the world. Center volunteers help operate the nature store, tea room and admissions desk. Library assistants, computer specialists and administrative support are always in demand.

For those wanting to get their hands dirty, putting their boots on the ground and mud between their toes, Corkscrew recruits resource management specialists to help with invasive plant removal, photomonitoring, prescribed burns, or herbarium maintenance. Or, volunteers can roll up their sleeves and help with grounds keeping, trail trimming and general maintenance.

Corkscrew's boots on the ground volunteer team keeps the sanctuary and center operating for our annual 100,000 visitors and students and for the birds and other wildlife that make the 13,000 acre sanctuary their home.

To learn more about volunteering at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary go to <http://corkscrew.audubon.org/volunteering-1> or call Amy Kessler, Volunteer Coordinator, at 239-348-9151, ext. 111 or email her at akessler@audubon.org.

NOTE: Special thanks to Collier County Audubon for their continued support of Corkscrew's education and policy work.



Bird Stewards and Colony Watch

Volunteers Help Coastal Bird Chicks Survive to Fledging

While spring and summer often calls to mind graduations and vacations, swimsuits and sunglasses, for a select group of Audubon Florida volunteers, this time of year only means one thing: a race to fledging. More than 500 dedicated individuals around the state participate as Coastal Bird Stewards or Colony Watch volunteers. Bird Stewards chaperone the vulnerable beach nesting sites of terns, skimmers, oystercatchers and plovers, to protect these species from human disturbance, help collect vital citizen science data, and serve as ambassadors on behalf of the birds. Colony Watch volunteers help monitor wading bird rookeries on island sites in lakes, rivers and coastal waters, conducting colony censuses and addressing threats to the birds that emerge throughout the year.

While the time volunteers spend on the beach and water is undoubtedly hard work, the rewards are tangible—watching the fuzzy, awkward chicks of these rare and declining species grow daily, in size and independence, until they one day successfully test their wings. Without the unfaltering support of these dedicated volunteers, we know many of these chicks would never survive to fledging. Despite the volunteers' persistence, many chicks still succumb to predators, extreme weather, and careless human activity when volunteers are not present.

The valuable data and observations collected by these volunteers are not only expanding the existing knowledge of these species in Florida, but volunteers take action at the birds' nesting sites. Whether volunteering at the landmark year-round bird protection area at St. Petersburg's Ft. DeSoto Park, advancing protections for the Wood Stork colony from boat disturbance on Polk County's Lake Somerset, standing guard at Indian Rocks Beach late on the 4th of July to protect chicks from fireworks displays, or ensuring the cessation of beach driving at St. Augustine's Ft. Matanzas National Monument - Colony Watch and Bird Steward volunteers are not merely going through the motions of completing assigned tasks. Instead, these integral volunteers are identifying needs, proposing solutions, and implementing protections that are leading Florida's race to save these declining species.

Photo by R. Munguia

Chapters with members involved with Colony Watch or Bird Stewards

- Apalachee Audubon
- Audubon of Southwest Florida
- Bay County Audubon
- Choctawhatchee Audubon
- Clearwater Audubon
- Collier County Audubon
- Duval Audubon
- Flagler Audubon
- Francis M. Weston Audubon
- Manatee Audubon
- Peace River Audubon
- St. Johns County Audubon
- Sarasota Audubon
- Seminole Audubon
- South Florida Audubon
- St. Petersburg Audubon
- Tampa Audubon
- Venice Area Audubon

Plus leadership from many other dedicated partner organizations.

We need your help! To get involved as a Colony Watcher or Bird Steward at a site near you, email: flconservation@audubon.org

I have been monitoring three colonies of wading birds for two nesting seasons. Last year at one of the colonies I waded out in the water and rescued a bird that was tied up in fishing line and hanging by its wing. This year, we are working on securing signs for one of the colonies so that people understand the importance of the birds that are nesting in their neighborhood. It is all about the birds. It really is great to see fledglings thrive and know that I had a part in making them safe.

-Cheryl Merz, Colony Watch Volunteer, Tampa

We as volunteer stewards are there to not only help keep the nesting birds safe, but to educate the public about their needs. It is always fun when you get a family that is excited to see the birds and you can hear the wonder in the children's voices. I offer to share my binoculars and point out any chicks that are in view. I love to share my love of the birds with others and educate the public on why we are helping to protect them.

-Jeneane Skelton, Bird Steward, Pensacola Beach



I am 13 years old and I am a bird steward. Last summer my Grandma started training student volunteers to help protect the Least Terns nesting on the beaches. We learned about the birds and

how to talk to people. We worked shifts with an adult volunteer. This summer I am volunteering again. It is fun talking to tourists that have no idea about the birds. They always think we are protecting turtle nests and are always surprised that the birds lay their eggs right on the sand. I feel good about educating people and helping the birds. I also enjoy hanging out on the beach.

-Michel Thomas, Bird Steward, Anastasia State Park, St. Augustine

Boots on the Ground in the Northern Everglades: Ranchers & Audubon Collaborate to Save the Ecosystem

Bald Eagle Protection

In the early 1960's Florida Audubon Executive Director C. Russell Mason recognized the ecological potential of the Northern Everglades. Mason and George Heinzman, an Audubon Florida chapter leader from Winter Haven, learned from National Geographic photographer Frederick K. Truslow that the largest breeding population of Bald Eagles in the continental United States was concentrated on the cattle ranches of the Kissimmee Prairie. Heinzman, author of the novel Powder River Cowman, had a strong interest in ranching and accordingly an innate ability to relate to the lives and concerns of ranchers. Due to Heinzman's relationship with the ranchers, he obtained permission to survey the Bald Eagle nests on ranchlands.

By October 1962 Florida Audubon established a voluntary sanctuary program where ranchers assumed the primary role of designating their private lands as cooperative Bald Eagle sanctuaries. In collaboration with the Florida Cattleman's Association, Audubon Florida enrolled 59 major landowners with properties comprising over a half-million acres. These sanctuaries became and continue to be a stronghold for Bald Eagle populations, thus providing a much needed boost to the species' recovery.

Managing Water Resources

Audubon Florida and the cattleman put boots on the ground 50 years ago to save the Bald Eagle and are working together today in the same landscape marching towards another common objective. Today, one of

the most pressing issues for the Everglades ecosystem is managing water quality and quantity. More precisely, Audubon Florida and its partners work to prevent too much water and too many polluting nutrients from entering Lake Okeechobee, surrounding estuaries and the Everglades, while also working to assure that too much water is not drained from Lake Okeechobee and its estuaries starving the Everglades of much needed water. Indeed, it is a very difficult balance to achieve.

Water held back in the Kissimmee headwaters can be used to moderate dry periods. Studies by the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) show that between 900,000 and 1,300,000 acre feet of additional water storage are needed north of Lake Okeechobee, in the Kissimmee headwaters, to bring about more natural conditions (one acre-foot is equal to 326,000 gallons). Government agencies suggested building thousands of acres of deep high-walled reservoirs to manage this water in the Kissimmee headwaters. Large reservoirs occupy wildlife habitat and carry price tags in the billions of dollars.

Audubon Florida and the ranchers have a different idea. Audubon Florida's Dr. Paul Gray explains: "If we are going to spend money to build a reservoir or a storm water treatment area, why not take some of that money and hire the ranchers to store and clean water on their land?"

These proposed projects are known as "Dispersed Water Management" since they seek to resolve the water storage and pollution removal problem through many smaller projects distributed throughout the Kissim-

mee watershed rather than in one or two massive projects.

Ranchers such as Jimmy Wohl, owner of Rafter T Ranch near Sebring, have already taken action. Wohl now stores and cleans some 500 acre feet of water through an impoundment built on his ranch.

Wohl is experimenting with other methods to accommodate water retention on cattle grazing lands. He has found a particular grass, Floralta Limpgrass, which is highly tolerant to flooding, allowing pasture land to remain flooded during part of the year while still producing good grazing for cattle.

Lykes Brothers Incorporated, one of Florida's largest cattle ranch companies, now has two major Dispersed Water Management projects underway. The first project, the West Waterhole, has some 2,500 acres impounded, and has already removed more than 13 tons of phosphorus from water flowing through a nearby SFWMD Canal. A larger project, called Nicodemus Slough, will store water on 16,000 acres and hold 30,000 acre feet of water.

The advantage of private dispersed water management is the strong probability that water storage and water cleanup projects will be expedited and be more cost efficient compared to conventional public works projects.

In addition to the Nicodemus Slough project, Rafter T Ranch, West Waterhole and six other pilot projects, SFWMD approved eight 10-year contracts for dispersed water management for approximately



Photos by Scott Taylor

\$7 million in 2012. In 2013, 24 new projects have been proposed by landowners, and were approved for further action in July. Unfortunately, SFWMD only has funding for a few of them. Audubon Florida has recommended that the district significantly expand funding for this cooperative program with ranchers.

Blake Guillory, the new Executive Director of the SFWMD favored Dispersed Water Management in a recent interview with the Ft. Myers News Press. Guillory said, "Dispersed water storage should be expanded. It's a great program." He is familiar with issues surrounding Lake Okeechobee's runoff into the Caloosahatchee River, the health of which has been deteriorating the last several years. "We need to do something about those discharges (from the lake). Dispersed water storage in the northern Everglades could make a difference," he explained.

Paul Gray, Audubon's scientist in the Northern Everglades sums up the task ahead: "We have to run some models to determine how much water we can actually catch and keep out of Lake Okeechobee -150,000 acres might mean 150,000 acre feet. That's three or four inches off Lake Okeechobee. If we hire the ranchers to help us fix our problems, it gives them one more source of income, it keeps them on the tax rolls, they are still producing food and fiber, it helps to restore Lake Okeechobee and we are helping to protect the water supply for the future of Florida." Ranchers and Audubon's earlier boots on the ground collaboration to save the Bald Eagle has broadened into a partnership to restore the Northern Everglades ecosystem.

For detailed information on Audubon's efforts with ranchers in the Northern Everglades and a video featuring the ranchers, go to: <http://fl.audubon.org/northern-everglades>. This program was funded in part by a grant from the Darden Restaurants, Inc. Foundation.

Sustainable Rancher Stories

Jimmy Wohl, Rafter T Ranch



Jimmy Wohl, Audubon's Sustainable Rancher of the Years, explains, "Our ranch converted one of our marsh pastures into a stormwater treatment area by building a dike around it from grants from the Natural Resource Conservation Service and South Florida Water Management District. Now instead of ranch runoff being pumped into Arbuckle Creek, it is pumped into a storm treatment area."

Linda McCarthy, Environmental Scientist, Lykes Bros.



Linda McCarthy confirms that dispersed water management projects help the overall ranch economy, "One of the things that we try to do is have multiple uses on a parcel. So what Lykes has done is we have cattle ranches, hunting leases, cabbage palm harvesting and now we have potentially a payment for environmental services component which will help us pay the bills, pay the taxes, and keep the land in a relatively natural condition and as un-intensively used as possible."

Bud Adams, Adams Ranch



Audubon is also working to support state and federal programs that purchase conservation easements from ranchers while preserving superb wildlife habitat. Bud Adams, one of the pioneers of environmentally sound ranching in the Northern Everglades explains why easement purchases are important to ranchers, "In passing these ranches down from generation to generation we have a problem of liquidity. We have tremendous investments in tens of thousands of acres of land and cattle. By doing an easement, it gives us liquidity to pay our obligations and taxes and settle with any family members that didn't wish to stay in the cattle business."

Photos by Scott Taylor



2013 Audubon Assembly

October 25-26, 2013

Innisbrook Resort and Spa
36750 US Highway 19 N.,
Palm Harbor, FL 34683

www.innisbrookgolfresort.com

Photo by Mac Stone

A cormorant with a wound to its chest being rescued by staff and volunteers at Ten Thousand Islands.

This year's Audubon Assembly focuses on Florida's inspiring grassroots citizen science and volunteer conservation efforts. Join us in Palm Harbor to share strategies and learn how Audubon and our dedicated "boots on the ground" supporters are using cutting-edge science to preserve and protect our state's most precious resources.

Registration Information:

Register online at <http://fl.audubon.org> to reserve your all-inclusive registration package. Registration includes all Friday and Saturday workshops, field trips, luncheons and awards banquet. To register by mail, contact Jonathan Webber at 850-222-2473 or via email at jwebber@audubon.org

Early bird registration: \$129
(on or before **October 11th**)
Regular registration: \$149

Innisbrook resort registration: \$129 per night if reserved by **October 3rd**. Please make reservations by calling 1-800-492-6899 and mention you are with Audubon Florida.

The Audubon Assembly begins with Friday's welcome luncheon, includes our annual awards banquet on Friday night and ends with the Chapter's luncheon on Saturday. Throughout the two day event, there will be many great field trips, learning sessions and presentations. Our annual conservation agenda setting session will take place on Saturday and is not to be missed!

Boots on the Ground Learning Sessions

After our kick-off lunch on Friday, you will have the opportunity to participate in three different breakout sessions. Each session will run twice, so you will have an opportunity to experience two in their entirety. The breakout sessions will center on the following themes:

Boots on the Ground for Advocacy

Time spent in Florida's special places and volunteer bird stewardship instills participants with a personal experience of the vital need for conservation. And when people

Learn more at www.AudubonBootsOn.org

speaking from a place of personal experience with Florida's lands, water, and wildlife they are powerful conservation advocates at multiple levels of government policy-making. In this session, learn how to cultivate leadership in your chapter's advocacy efforts.

Boots on the Ground for Citizen Science

Whether it's Florida Scrub-Jays, beach-nesting birds, sea turtles, or wading bird rookeries, data collected by trained citizen scientists provides information vital to habitat management. Join us for a discussion of the components of a successful citizen science program, volunteer recruitment and retention, and the ways in which these programs support conservation in Florida.

Boots on the Ground for Habitat Stewardship

When it comes to habitat stewardship, there is no substitute for a team of engaged, passionate and knowledgeable individuals willing to pull on their boots and apply themselves to a conservation challenge.

Boots on the Ground: Citizen Science and Habitat Stewardship



ADVOCACY



STEWARDSHIP



CITIZEN SCIENCE



EDUCATION



Stewardship takes many forms; from tackling invasive species to applying prescribed fire, or even working to re-establish native species. This session will showcase a handful of these important and effective habitat stewardship strategies.

Field Trips

Audubon field trips will provide some exciting opportunities at the 2013 Assembly. For those who choose to arrive on Thursday evening or very early on Friday we are planning three all-morning field trips.

A visit to Honeymoon Island will include beaches, mangrove swamps, and tidal flats to view a wide variety of shorebirds. We will stop on the causeway to search for Whimbrels, peeps and other shorebirds before continuing to the Osprey Trail for a short one-mile walk through one of the few remaining virgin slash pine forests in South Florida. We will then continue to Pelican Cove where the vista opens onto the Bay giving us more opportunities to scope for shorebirds.

Those who choose to visit Brooker Creek will experience at least part of this 8,700-acre preserve complete with a nature center, boardwalk and a large network of trails. Migration can provide all kinds of surprises

(including fall warblers) along with the resident forest and wetland birds.

The Key Vista, Anclote Park and Green Key trips will give us a sampling of landscapes and birding opportunities.

For Saturday morning we have three short but sweet trips planned. Wall Spring Park is one of the jewels of Pinellas County featuring forested areas and tidal marsh. We will scour forest edges for migrants and climb the multi-level observation tower to enjoy the vista.

The Possum Branch Mitigation Area provides an easy walk and in past visits has offered a variety of treats. As a third option some assembly participants will choose John Chesnut Park, a favorite spot for locals.

Sign up for field trips on-site at the Assembly registration table. Visit <http://fl.audubon.org> for a full list of field trip times and details.

Conservation Leadership Initiative

Back by popular demand, the Conservation Leadership Initiative (CLI) will engage college students with a passion for conservation, and work to collaborate on ideas to attract the next generation of environmental

leaders. Participation in CLI requires advance registration. Please contact flconservation@audubon.org if you are interested in participating in this exciting program.

Chapter Awards Nominations Needed!

The Saturday Chapter Awards Luncheon recognizes significant chapter achievements and milestones, while exhibits on display throughout the Assembly showcase inspiring chapter efforts and projects.

Know a chapter deserving of an award? Nominate yours or another chapter for the following categories:

- Chapter of the Year
- Best Conservation Project
- Best Education Project
- Best Membership Recruitment program

Nominations and supporting materials must be received by September 30th for consideration. For additional questions or to submit nominations, contact Jacqui Sulek, Chapter Conservation Manager, at jsulek@audubon.org or (386) 497-4185.

Boots on the Ground: Corporate Volunteers in Action

Audubon Florida has benefitted for years from generous corporate contributions, but in recent years an exciting trend has occurred. Companies both large and small want to show their support for conservation by increasing their volunteer involvement. Organizations want to build a relationship, learn more, and do a team building experience. They want to feel part of making a difference in a deeper way.

Many companies have placed their corporate boots on the ground through Audubon's board and advisory committees, in our centers, at restoration sites and in front of students. Staff benefits not just from extra people power, but from great insights and business savvy that is making us a stronger organization.

The Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland has help from many corporations. A special thanks is due to Disney VoluntEARS, a group of volunteers who dedicate at least four full days a year to conduct landscape and maintenance work at the Center, including improvements and repairs to the 100-foot Disney Magic of Flight Barn that allows injured raptors to regain strength and test their wings before release. Massey Services Inc. provides quality onsite pest control. For over 30 years, Winter Park Veterinary Hospital has donated several free surgeries a year along with deep discounts for other services. AVS provides free avian eye care. SeaWorld and Busch Gardens employees participate in TogetherGreen events to restore onsite wetlands, as well as on-going individual volunteering. These are just a few of the many examples of corporate engagement at the Center.

Wells Fargo has been an invaluable contributor of funding and volunteer support. Kate Wilson, Vice President and Community Affairs Officer in Central Florida, states, "At Wells Fargo, we believe those of us who can should lead positive environmental change, and we embrace that responsibility. We are pleased that the expertise of our team members is helping to protect and preserve our environment."

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary has also benefitted from business involvement. Northern Trust placed their corporate boots on the ground this year by sponsoring two



A team of Wells Fargo volunteers removed 3500 nuisance pine saplings to help restore endangered scrub habitat at Lyonia Preserve near Deland. The habitat is home of the threatened Florida Scrub-Jay. Wells Fargo is supporting Jay Watch through a grant administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

fall sunflower tours to expose new guests to the Sanctuary. They did not stop there. In the spring, they hosted three programs attracting hundreds of attendees to promote Audubon's work in the Everglades.

Audubon's Florida Coastal Islands staff benefitted this year from a generous donation of 50 percent of a truck from Jim Ferman and Ferman Chevrolet/Motor Car Company. The Mosaic Foundation, the Tampa Bay Estuary Program, Tampa Electric Company, and Gulfstream Natural Gas Pipeline supported the Hillsborough Bay Boater's Guide, critical outreach to boaters and the public about natural resources. John Landon and his engineering team at Landon, Moree and Associates provided professional advice and services for our breakwater installation work at the Alafia Bank Bird Sanctuary, to control erosion, create a quiet water living shoreline, provide oyster structure and fish habitat, and protect bird nesting and roosting trees. This project was funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and The Mosaic Foundation."

Corporate volunteers are an incredible help to Audubon's efforts, and deserve our deepest appreciation. We are so fortunate to be engaged with such thoughtful people at all levels who all work together to make Florida a better place for people and wildlife.



Top: A young eaglet is being examined by Dr. Hess from the Winter Park Veterinary Hospital.

Bottom: Disney VoluntEARS helping with improvements maintenance of a flight barn.



Little Boots, Big Heart



Cassidy Camera sitting with Newton, an American Kestrel, one of her favorite birds at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey. Photo by Katie Warner

Sometimes little actions make the biggest difference. Even the smallest children can have the biggest hearts. Such is the case for Cassidy Camera, a 9 year old who believes in Audubon's mission at the Center for Birds of Prey and took the initiative to help the birds she loves. Cassidy shared her generosity and care for her feathered friends by hosting her birthday party at the Center. The Center focuses on rescuing, treating, and releasing Florida's Raptors.

Cassidy visited the Center several times with her parents and fell in love with the scenery, habitats, and, of course, the birds. But it was the purpose of the Center that had the greatest impact on Cassidy. When asked how she decided to host a birthday party at the Center, she replied, "It made me sad to see the injured birds. I wanted to help them and donate to help them." And that is exactly what Cassidy did. "I told my mom that I wanted to have my birthday party at the Center," said Cassidy. "We both thought it would be a good idea."

The birthday party generated \$150 from the family's tour admissions and gazebo rental. The attendees contributed an additional \$150 as donations to the Center as gifts to the birthday girl. The group was provided a tour of the Center and reserved the gazebo for cake and ice cream. Yet, despite the cake and snacks, Cassidy's favorite

part of the day was seeing all the birds. She was even able to have her picture taken with Newton the American Kestrel, a resident bird. Asked how she felt after spending her birthday at the Center, Cassidy replied, "Really good and excited, and happy."

Cassidy and her family are not new to such noble causes. The family

is also actively involved in several charities and has donated to other causes such as endangered birds at the Sanford Zoo and rescue horses. Despite the involvement in a variety of causes, Cassidy's birthday party at the Center may have the most meaning to not only Cassidy and her family but also her guests and ultimately the Center. Two guests at Cassidy's party are now scheduling their own respective parties at the Center, a strong sign that even small acts of charity can spread and lead to more widespread awareness of great causes.

"They are so unique and their lives are just as important as ours."

The Center is fortunate to have such passionate young people like Cassidy who are willing to help in any way that they can. Cassidy was not focused on herself on her special day, but rather the birds of prey. Cassidy shared her belief in the inherent value of the birds because as she said, "They are so unique and their lives are just as important as ours." This is a profound reminder that in the relationship between humans and birds, we have a potential to have a greater role than we may think, no matter how old or who we are.

Are you interested in celebrating your special occasion at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey and having gifts for your special event support Audubon's conservation work? Call Margaret Spontak at call at (352) 229-2887 or email mspontak@audubon.org.

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Join Us For The Audubon FLORIDA Assembly 2013

Boots On The Ground for Conservation

October 25-26, 2013
Innisbrook Resort and Golf Club
Palm Harbor, Florida

Registration is now open at <http://fl.audubon.org>

Inside this edition of the Naturalist find:

- Two-page conference section
- Information on learning sessions
- Details on special field trips
- Features about Audubon Florida's Dedicated Volunteer Team

NOTICE OF FLORIDA AUDUBON SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING

Pursuant to the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws, notice is hereby given that the annual meeting of the Florida Audubon Society will be held at the Innisbrook Resort, Palm Harbor, Florida at 1:45 p.m. on October 26, 2013.

