

4TH ANNUAL AUDUBON ACADEMY APRIL 4-6, 2008



Gopher tortoise by R. J. Wiley



WINTER 2007 / 08

Florida Naturalist

AUDUBON CHAPTERS: Champions for a Better Florida

The dynamic Audubon Academy is on the move--to Vero Beach, with Pelican Island Audubon as host. Mark your calendars for April 4 - 6, 2008. Invited featured speaker is Carol Browner, National Audubon board chair, who served eight years as director of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Workshops designed to help chapters become more effective conservation champions include:

- Is anyone listening? A guide for successfully advocating your position.
- Measuring sustainability and quality of life, with special guest from National Audubon.
- What you should know about Florida water.
- Creating a successful land acquisition program in your county, with Indian River County as a model.
- Power to the people: Working with local officials to write conservation into ordinances for your county.
- Growing your chapter membership: Creating tools for all Florida chapters to use for recruiting and retaining members.

Abundant opportunities for field trips are planned in this beautiful part of Florida. The Will McLean Foundation ("Saving Florida through Music") will again partner with Audubon to present a concert on Saturday, April 5, that will energize and inspire. Registration materials and detailed information will be available in early January 2008 at www.audubonofflorida.org. Questions? Contact Jacqui Sulek, Chapters Coordinator, at jsulek@audubon.org, or Joyce King, Academy Coordinator, at sjoyceking@comcast.net.

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



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

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Executive Director *David E. Anderson*
Policy & Communications Advisor *Traci Romine*
Post Production Assistance *Vicky Johnston and Lisa K. Reichert*
Editorial Consultant *Susan Cumins*
Design and Production *Franz Franc Design Group*
Cover *Ghost Orchid by R. J. Wiley www.rjwileyphoto.com*



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2008 Conservation
Action Agenda

Saving the Next
2 Million Acres

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE WHY WE SAVE THE LAND



Long, graceful root tendrils fall below curling white petals and sepals. Their green tint comes from chloroplasts that photosynthesize solar light to energy, a job the roots do in lieu of leaves. These roots also absorb moisture from the air. Thicker gray roots spread like a spider web across the 400-year-old cypress trunk, holding the plant securely 40 feet off the ground, seemingly suspended in air. The center petal on each of the ten flowers is modified to form a platform, a small landing pad for pollinators, usually flying insects. It is one of the most complex organisms of the plant kingdom. It is the rare "ghost orchid."

The story of the orchid I just described to you was carried by more than 150 news outlets. Thousands of people came to Corkscrew Sanctuary to see it—the orchid bloomed twice, captivating its visitors. Scientists and conservationists, usually mum about ghost orchid locations, released the news because they knew the plant would be safe, given the stringent protections in this unique swamp sanctuary.

The Corkscrew Sanctuary is a carefully guarded vestige of very special habitat that once spread throughout southwest Florida. It is a sterling example of the many efforts by Audubon to save and restore special lands throughout Florida, where ghost orchids and numerous species once were prevalent but now find themselves so boxed in that a sighting becomes a "phenomenon."

We are a species distinguished from others, in part, by our capacity to recognize beauty and feel emotion when we see the delicate lines of a fragile ghost orchid petal floating in air, or witness the flare of a snail kite's wings as he powers over a field, feet dangling and clutching his prize apple snail. We are also the species most capable of, and responsible for, shaping and altering our environment. We must act on that ability and obligation and restore those vast tracts of altered lands and preserve our few remaining natural habitats.

Despite vast changes to the land that people have wrought over time, it is still possible to pull together broad spans of habitat to form stable ecosystems with interconnecting wildlife corridors, and we can maintain and manage barrier islands and coastal habitat. We've proven that we know how to do this. But much more needs to be done. To do more, we must act together and increase the financial support needed to sustain and expand efforts Audubon has successfully deployed to save and preserve habitat for the ghost orchid, the snail kite, and the beauty that stirs our hearts.

David E. Anderson
Executive Director, Audubon of Florida



Wood storks by R. J. Wiley

Protecting Birds and Our Land, Air and Water

Audubon's 2008 Conservation Action Agenda

Hundreds of conservation leaders from around Florida gathered on November 2 and 3 at the Audubon Assembly in Cocoa Beach. They unanimously ratified Audubon of Florida's 2008 Conservation Action Agenda. On this and the following page, Audubon's five policy and six strategic regional priorities are excerpted. For the full 2008 Conservation Action Agenda, visit www.audubonofflorida.org. While you are there, support Audubon and help achieve our goals to conserve and protect Florida's land, air, water and wildlife, as well as our quality of life.

Land Conservation and Public Land

Management: Audubon will work to increase state appropriations to at least \$300 million for buying state conservation lands and to \$200 million for water management lands next year. Advocates will focus on launching a new program by early 2009 to at least double the land conservation funding available, and will work toward completing land acquisitions for Everglades Restoration and Lake Okeechobee Recovery by 2010. Audubon will also push for new local and regional public land acquisition initiatives. Finally, Audubon will encourage conservation through land use to place conservation easements on private lands as compensation for increased development density; and for funding for management of public lands to restore natural habitats, control invasive species and make appropriate use of prescribed fire.

Growth and Transportation: To meet the challenges of development pressure, Audubon will increase grassroots participation in regional and local plans to designate habitat protection areas, and require specific conservation lands and mitigation. Advocates will work to focus the state's growth management oversight on

ecosystems and natural areas, and support a greater role for state agencies in protecting and restoring areas of regional or statewide concern. Audubon will work to divert highway corridors away from intact ecosystems and natural areas, and insist that highway projects that do punch through natural areas be required to provide considerable funding to compensate for the additional growth pressure placed on rural lands. Highway corridor and route decisions must also be preceded by state, regional, and local decisions on land use made in a comprehensive, coordinated process to counter road-induced growth pressures. Audubon will lobby to increase funding for mass transit projects and decrease spending on conventional road projects.

Wildlife and Protected Species: Focusing on species and the protection of their habitats, Audubon will work to amend and strengthen state and federal protected species rules to increase emphasis on appropriate designation and protection of species and critical habitat. Advocates will work for habitat acquisition, both full-title and less-than fee alternatives; use Audubon science to support efforts to restore key habitats and systems, and support innovative programs to support wildlife conservation on private lands. Regarding public agencies, Audubon will demand enforcement and expansion of existing imperiled wildlife protections, seek consistent consideration for wildlife protection in permitting and rule-making across agencies, and work to secure wildlife management agency commitment to adequate maintenance of healthy habitats. Audubon will work to ensure that development and transportation options do not negatively impact birds and wildlife, and will work to increase awareness of wildlife conservation issues.

Water for the Environment: Audubon will focus on revising state policies to ensure that water for natural areas is legally allocated before being permitted for other uses. Specifically, advocates will urge water management districts to set uncompromising schedules for reserving water for natural systems and for establishing Minimum Flows and Levels (MFLs). Audubon will focus on improving and restoring natural storage capacity in order to reduce withdrawals and diversions, and encourage partnerships to finance water storage and allow storage of water on private lands. Additionally, focused energy will be targeted at reducing pollution, strengthening cleanup of polluted waterways, and enacting stronger wetlands protection policies at all levels.

Climate Change: With a focus on reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050, Audubon will work to implement Governor Charlie Crist's Executive Orders on global warming, as well as to minimize risks posed by rising sea levels and other global warming impacts. Audubon will promote adoption of clean alternative energy sources in both energy production and transportation, oppose new roads that increase Florida's dependence on single passenger vehicles, and support transportation strategies that move people and goods efficiently. Finally, Audubon will promote energy conservation and efficiency, green building standards, compact development and other energy efficiency technologies, as well as sustainable renewable energy sources so that electric power utilities can harness sustainable solar, biomass and other energy generation technologies.

Audubon's 2008 Regional Conservation Priorities

Organized into six strategic regions across the state, Audubon of Florida and its forty-three chapters bring policy expertise, on-the-ground perspective, and experience to help plot the conservation course of the state organization. Our regional programs unite Audubon science, policy, and grassroots efforts.

Everglades and Lake Okeechobee: Audubon will continue its leadership role as advocates for the restoration of the Everglades and Lake Okeechobee, paying close attention to achieving proper water storage and treatment around the Lake, pollution control and cleanup, as well as re-establishing the proper flows of clean fresh water north from the Lake, through the Everglades Agricultural Area and south to Everglades National Park and Florida and Biscayne bays. These efforts require billions of dollars and real commitment from federal, state, and local decision makers to buy land and build the most ecologically beneficial projects. Audubon's focus will be on ensuring that the government delivers on its commitments to restore these important ecosystems.

Southwest Florida: From the old growth cypress forest protected in the Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary to vital habitats and foraging grounds for wildlife (including the wood stork, Florida panther, and snook), Audubon's program in this region is focused on saving our swamp from the crushing impact of development. Audubon's commitment emerges from the Sanctuary and extends through the region's vital watersheds, including the critical habitats of Babcock Ranch, Caloosahatchee River, Charlotte Harbor, and Fisheating Creek.

Gulf Coast: Florida's Gulf coastal areas include a rich assemblage of essential habitats critical to diverse species of birds and other wildlife. However, much of this region's rich diversity is threatened by population growth and development. Building on the work of its Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries and active chapters, Audubon will support strategies to protect and restore coastal habitats from the impacts of growth, altered watersheds, and inappropriate

activity such as disturbance by humans, dogs and cats. We will support new state, local, water management district, and regional land acquisition programs and continue work to protect and manage colonial waterbird and shorebird nesting, foraging, roosting and migratory habitats, seagrass and inland habitat ecosystems, and designated Important Bird Areas.

Northwest: The Northwest is home to critical stopover habitat and staging areas for neotropical migratory birds, countless resident bird species and hosts significant numbers of wintering shorebirds and waterfowl. Threats to the natural system stems from the area's recent, rapid population growth. Thus, a more comprehensive and ecosystem-driven plan is necessary for each of this region's drainage basins. At the center of Audubon's work in the Northwest is protection of up to 40,000 acres of marshes and natural lands in the West Bay area of St. Andrew Bay. Audubon responded to development proposed in the West Bay Sector Plan, finding that maintaining the biological health of the area depends on the decisions in land-use plans and commitments by the St. Joe Company and state and local governments to protect habitat as compensation for development. Audubon will establish a nature center on West Bay and work toward permanent protection of the conservation lands, appropriate locations for mitigation lands, and the designation of a holder for the conservation easements.

Northeast: The beaches of Northeast Florida are of critical significance to shorebirds and its marshes are essential nurseries for fish and invertebrate stocks and shelter significant wading bird populations as well as secretive rails. Coastal maritime hammock is one of the most imperiled habitats of this region. When left in

its natural state, it is one of the few remaining acceptable nesting locations for dwindling populations of painted buntings. Similarly, these hammocks provide essential autumn refueling sites for neotropical migrants and serve as first refuges upon their spring return. Inland, this region includes the lower St. Johns River, an incredible diversity of springsheds, as well as the significant expanse of the Osceola National Forest. In this region, Audubon will take an active role in protecting and restoring these important habitats and water resources.

Central Florida: Central Florida's growth will continue and under current patterns of development, it is estimated an additional 1.1 million acres of native habitat and agricultural lands could give way to urban development. The remaining unprotected portions of the Wekiva, St. Johns, Green Swamp/Withlacoochee, and Upper Kissimmee and Lake Wales Ridge ecosystems are in the direct path of the Orlando area's urban expansion. Audubon will implement strategies to minimize the impacts of this growth on natural lands, water resources and wildlife. Advocates will focus on public programs to acquire, preserve and manage land, local government land use plans that require new development, and redevelopment projects to set aside equivalent amounts of land for parks and preserves along with development features that preserve nature, prevent water pollution and require a landscape design that avoids wasteful uses of water.



Peregrine Falcon by R.J. Wiley

SAVING THE NEXT 2 MILLION ACRES

Long ago Florida conservationists had dream. Long ago in Sunshine State terms means twenty years and six million residents back. Even then ten million people seemed like too many. The roads were crowded and the countryside was disappearing under roofs. Like today, but more shocking, because we had not yet grown used to the unrelenting push of growth.

It was then that Florida conservationists, including the leadership of Florida Audubon Society, promoted a suite of strategies to offset growth. The formula: Keep new development near existing urban areas, protect wetlands and aquifer recharge zones and buy three million acres or more of the state's most environmentally endangered land. It worked - kind of.

Yet now we are at the end of a series of nationally-acclaimed public land acquisition programs - Preservation 2000 and Florida Forever - and land conservation is still losing the race with development. What happened?

Parts of key ecosystems are being converted to urban areas at a rapid rate. Housing markets are off a bit and that has slowed the loss of natural Florida. But history shows this is a temporary phenomenon. Tens of millions of soon-to-retire baby boomers have the Sunbelt in their retirement plans, and Florida will always be more attractive than Alabama.

A sneak peak around history's curve shows lots more of what we have experienced. So conservationists are pushing the Florida Legislature for a major increase in funding for land conservation. Florida Forever is in its last years, and its limited funds are committed to just a few of the projects on a lists that aims to protect some two million acres of habitat.

Ironically, the housing market's downturn has removed the primary source of funding for public land conservation. For more than twenty years a growing stream of taxes associated with real estate closings have been pledged against land conservation bonds. With housing sales and the tax stream off, legislators have started chopping land programs.

Facing opposition from Audubon and its allies in the Florida Forever Coalition, the Legislature just reduced a key land conservation trust fund by nearly 20 percent. The cut funds are used to pay to manage existing conservation lands. By cutting the funds, legislators set up a significant argument against buying land. Next they will claim that without funds to manage public lands no more land should be bought.

"Florida has made major investments in acquiring public lands through the Conservation and Recreation Lands Program, Preservation 2000, and Florida Forever. Those lands must be managed for public access, for prescribed fire, to control invasive species, and to restore and enhance habitat"

— Audubon of Florida Deputy Director in letter to Governor Charlie Crist.

Audubon is taking the case to the public. A series of dialogues on the funding and tools for land and water conservation will invite grassroots Florida conservationists to propose land conservation projects and new ways to finance and secure land and water conservation priorities. The dialogues began at the Audubon Assembly in November. We expect the recommendations to include:

1. Increase the state budget for buying conservation lands to \$300 million.
2. Launch a new acquisition program beginning in 2009 using of bonds to at least double funds available for land conservation.
3. Complete land acquisition for Everglades Restoration and Lake Okeechobee Recovery by 2010.
4. Initiate new local and regional public land acquisition initiatives.
5. Encourage conservation through Land Use to place conservation easements on private lands as compensation for increased development density.
6. Fund management of public lands to restore natural habitats, control invasive species, and make appropriate use of prescribed fire.

These policies should help Florida prepare for the next wave of growth. Audubon will do what we do best - deploy compelling professional and grassroots advocacy to persuade the Legislature and the Governor to make conservation a top priority. That is the Florida conservation dream.

ROOFTOPS OR EAGLE NESTS? The Challenge of the Kissimmee Prairie

In the early 1960s former Florida Audubon president Russ Mason had an idea to help revive the dwindling bald eagle population in Florida. He enlisted ranchers in Osceola County in an effort to sign up their lands as “Cooperative Eagle Sanctuaries.” Ranchers and their employees got educational material about the eagles nesting on their land, and took pride in preserving the nests and habitats of this majestic bird. Today, more eagles nest in the headwaters of the Kissimmee River in Polk and Osceola counties than did in the entire lower 48 states in the 1960s.

The dynamics of ranching in rural Florida has changed dramatically in the 45 years since Audubon began its effort to conserve land in the Kissimmee valley. Today, ranch families are torn apart by lucrative offers from development interests who offer more money than they could ever imagine making off the land through cattle and other agricultural uses. While many associated with ranches still hope to preserve the rural way

of life, others in those families are eager to obtain money for retirement, college tuitions, or other needs and desires.

Today, as in the past, Audubon is concerned with the preservation of the vital wildlife habitats on Kissimmee ranchlands. We have been working vigorously to conceive and promote programs to acquire lands outright, or otherwise empower permanent commitments to ranchland conservation through innovative means.

A milestone was reached this October when the Osceola County Commission voted unanimously to purchase 2,100 acres of prime wildlife habitat on the Lonesome Camp Ranch just east of Lake Cypress and the Florida Turnpike. Owners of the ranch desire ultimately to move its entire 6,700 acres into conservation if an economically acceptable means to do so can be found. Over 300 acres of land adjacent to this tract were also purchased recently from the Bronson family for preservation.

The 2,100-acre Lonesome Camp Ranch purchase, at a cost of \$15 million or \$7,000 per acre, reflects the land values currently predominant on ranchlands outside the “Urban Growth Boundary” proposed in the Osceola County Comprehensive Plan. Lands nearer or inside the Growth Boundary are much more expensive, often \$25,000 per acre or more. Lonesome Camp Ranch was approved for purchase under the “Save Osceola” program, a locally-established environmental land purchase effort supported by Audubon and other environmental organizations.

However, funds in the “Save Osceola” program—and even all the state's land purchase programs combined—don't provide enough money to assure preservation of an adequate ecological base in the Upper Kissimmee Watershed. The use of tools such as “transfer of development rights” (under which landowners can sell their development rights to others to use in urban infill areas), offer the promise of methods other than outright

purchase as a means to conserve lands. Another innovative effort is “Rural Land Stewardship,” which allows approval of dense development on one small section of a large rural tract in exchange for guaranteed preservation in perpetuity of the largest part (typically 80 percent or more) of the landscape.

For now, thanks to the Lonesome Camp Ranch purchase, over four square miles of some of the best habitat in the state for crested caracara, bald eagles, sandhill cranes, and a myriad of wading birds has retreated from the risk of real estate development into permanent conservation.

Audubon of Florida applauds the collaborative efforts of Osceola County, and the owners of Lonesome Camp Ranch to make this important conservation victory a reality.

ECOLOGICAL CRISIS IN FLORIDA BAY: The Algae Bloom

For the third consecutive year, a massive blue-green algae bloom has dramatically compromised the health of Florida Bay. This bloom presents the Bay with potentially disastrous consequences, including fish evacuations, and die-offs of seagrass and invertebrates. Conservative estimates in October 2007 placed the extent of the bloom at 300 square miles. However, it probably covered an even larger area, based on reports placing it at the reef line off Islamorada and Long Key, and as far south as Vaca Cut in Marathon. This particular bloom is extraordinary because it has turned up in every basin in central, south and southwestern Florida Bay. Its size far exceeds that of blooms of the early 1990s, which prompted the major effort to restore the Everglades.

The cause of the algae bloom is unclear. A combination of factors may be likely contributors, such as excess nutrients, reduced fresh water flows into Florida Bay, source algae from a nearby bloom in Biscayne Bay, and possibly groundwater interchange from sewage pipe construction in Key Largo and Tavernier.

Audubon of Florida is calling on state and federal government agencies to reduce the frequency and severity of future blooms by expediting the following projects:

- Implementing the long-delayed Modified Waters Delivery Project, which will restore sheetflow of fresh water into the Everglades and Florida Bay.
- Constructing an environmentally sound alternative to the proposed the C-111 Spreader Canal allowing fresh water to sheetflow into Florida Bay.
- Completing the backfilling of the existing C-111 Canal.
- Complying with Florida Bay Minimum Flows and Levels.

For more information, or to report a sighting of the bloom, visit the algae bloom forum board at <http://algae.forumotion.com/index.htm>



Photo of Lonesome Camp Ranch by Muller and Associates

Low down on Okeechobee



Photos of female snail kite by Mike Tracy

When the wet season ended back in the fall of 2006, the water level in Lake Okeechobee stood at 13 feet. Six months later, at the end of the winter dry season, the lake hit its lowest level ever recorded, 8.82 feet. Today, as we enter the 2007 dry season, the lake is a full three feet below what it was a year ago. Which means that, barring a late-season deluge, the coming dry season may see the worst water shortages in South Florida's history.

The traditional solution to replenishing the lake during times like these has been to pump water from the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) back into the lake, a practice known as "backpumping." Backpumping does bolster lake levels somewhat, but has been extremely controversial due to excess nutrients and other constituents in the EAA water. These harm Okeechobee and create water quality problems for the communities who rely on the lake for drinking water. Moving the EAA water to Okeechobee also diverts it from southern regions where millions of people need it to recharge the aquifers upon which they rely.

This year, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) weighed the pros and cons of backpumping and decided against it. In retrospect, this looks like a good decision, as backpumping would not have raised Okeechobee's level enough to change rationing levels, and areas to the south have actually needed the water. Plus, the lake would have received harmful water.

Although there likely will be little drought relief in the short-term, Audubon has been working on longer-term changes in water management in South Florida to permanently reduce drought impacts. Audubon released a report earlier this year estimating that, by storing significantly more water upstream of the lake, great improvements could be gained by avoiding extreme high levels leading to large estuary dumps, and extreme low levels leading to water restrictions. Based on this data, Audubon successfully worked to include a provision into the 2007 Legislature's "Northern Everglades" bill to have the agencies recalculate these parameters.

The SFWMD's recalculations, now released, agree closely with Audubon's assertions. By roughly tripling water storage upstream of the lake, extremely high and low lake levels become very rare, greatly improving the lake's hydrology. Fewer deep levels translates to about a 50 percent reduction in large "emergency" estuary dumps. (To eliminate them altogether, we need additional work south of the lake to move water toward the Everglades.) And fewer very low levels translates to a greater-than-50 percent reduction in water supply cutbacks, which clearly is a benefit to the farms and cities that rely on the lake for water supply.

These new calculations will be released in a technical plan for public review in early November, with a goal of obtaining Governing Board approval in January and submission to the Legislature on February 1, 2008. The water management system that today leaves few beneficial options when droughts or floods occur can be rebuilt to cure both extremes. Audubon will continue its successful work to improve water management for all the inhabitants of South Florida.

The decision by the SFWMD Governing Board not to back-pump marked the first time this practice has been avoided during drought. It reflects a growing awareness of the deterioration that Lake Okeechobee suffers as a result of backpumping and other harmful practices, and a more balanced approach to water management. Audubon testified to the Governing Board about the ways backpumping is detrimental to the Lake (and estuaries that ultimately receive most Okeechobee's outflow), and can exacerbate droughts in the Everglades and lower east coast, whose water is diverted away from them by backpumping.

CHAPTER AWARDS PRESENTED AT 2007 ASSEMBLY

Pelican Island Audubon Society BEST CHAPTER AWARD, 2007



With nearly 650 members and an impressive program schedule, Pelican Island Audubon Society (PIAS) carries out conservation work, outreach, and education. They worked with the Pelican Island Elementary School Eco-Troop to purchase 18 residential lots of vital scrub jay habitat, and drafted a re-write of the County Landscape Ordinance to effect one of the strongest protective tree ordinances in the state. Members participate on multiple boards and committees, including Planning and Zoning, Land Acquisition Advisory, Conservation Lands

Advisory, Growth Awareness Committee, Agricultural Advisory Committee and Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors. They founded the Gopher Tortoise Task Force, with St. Lucie Audubon and other organizations, to relocate tortoises from lands being developed.

PIAS has already raised \$110,000 of the needed \$200,000 (to be matched by state funds) for a Pelican Island office, classroom and outreach center at the University of Florida. The facility will be built adjacent to the Oslo Riverfront Conservation Area (ORCA) where PIAS runs frequent canoe trips. Chapter president Dr. Richard Baker and the board will host the fourth annual Audubon Academy in Vero Beach in April 2008.

Tampa Audubon Society BEST CHAPTER EDUCATION PROGRAM

The critical bird conservation message—Keep Your Cats Indoors—came across loud and clear in Hillsborough County last spring. Tampa Audubon volunteer Jo Anne Hartzler led a series of volunteer efforts that brought the "Cats Indoors" message to elementary school students throughout Hillsborough County. Teachers and students learned about birds and the threat outdoor cats pose to their survival. Students created posters expressing their visions of healthy and happy cats indoors, and safe birds outdoors in yards.

A big challenge was choosing the winners from 200 poster submissions, some of which were displayed at the Audubon Resource Center at

Lettuce Lake Park, the Hillsborough County Cooperative Extension Services, and the county's Animals Services office. A nature walk where all ages could test newly-acquired birding skills was one of many activities at the awards ceremony at Lettuce Lake. In addition to the top prizes (which included a birding guides and CDs for the school libraries of the winners), all the young artists received recognition and tokens of appreciation. The initiative was partially funded by a collaborative grant from National Audubon. The winning posters can be seen at www.tampaaudubon.org.

St. Johns County Audubon Society BEST CHAPTER CONSERVATION PROJECT

With a strong leadership background in Audubon and a passion for monitoring and counting birds, chapter president Diane Reed encouraged and nurtured interest in this award-winning least tern monitoring project. Its success was summarized in an email from Alex Kropp, regional biologist



Photo by Dave Kandz

for Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission: "This year has been ground-breaking from the standpoint of partnership development. I count 20 Beach-nesting Bird partners that have contributed their time to conserving St. John's county BNBS this year. Great job everyone!"

FFWCC provided local training and guidance, while Ned and Teddy Shuler coordinated volunteers from the chapter and the broader community to monitor nesting colonies on beaches and on rooftops. The data they gathered is valuable for future management of the species, whose nesting habitat has been depleted by development. Supported by grants from National Audubon and Jesse Ball duPont Foundation, the volunteers were instructed by members of St. Petersburg Audubon and other chapter colleagues at the Audubon Assembly and Audubon Academy. This inspiring example of cooperation and synergy among agencies and chapters continues to expand in the Northeast Region.

Eagle Audubon Society SPECIAL RECOGNITION

Special recognition was given to the Eagle Audubon Society whose members are celebrating their 25th anniversary. Chapter historian Kay Kruikshank hopes that, with this recognition, Audubon of Florida will begin

to recognize annually the chapters that reach milestones of 25, 50, 75 and 100 years of fun, education and conservation.

Audubon Assembly 2007

Volunteer of the Year Awards

Ken Hale, 2007 Volunteer of the Year, Audubon Center for Birds of Prey.

In March 2007 Ken Hale celebrated 16 years of volunteer service to the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey.

Although Ken lives in Titusville where he works as a NASA engineer, he has driven over an hour each way to volunteer his Saturdays or Sundays at the Center since 1991. His mileage—including the commute, bird rescues and releases—totals more than 43,000 miles. Ken's work as a senior clinic volunteer is invaluable to Center's operations, and his volunteer hours add up to more than three years of 40-hour work weeks.

"Ken is also a financial supporter of our work; he donates money and in-kind items needed for the care, feeding, and medical treatment of our raptors," says Dianna Flynt, Center Rehabilitation Supervisor. "Ken has literally touched the lives of thousands of raptors. He is an invaluable part of our family."

Kris Gabel and Greg Nelson, 2007 Volunteers of the Year, Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary recognize that conservation is an effort that benefits multiple generations. To honor the grandmothers, the husband-and-wife volunteers, who moved to Southwest Florida from Minnesota in 1998, purchased materials and rebuilt an overlook platform on the boardwalk trail. "As we observe the graceful flight of the wood storks, we remember you while you soar in the heavens watching over us," reads a plaque they placed there.

Kris is a practicing corporate attorney and CPA. Greg retired as owner of a technology company. Both are trained as guides for Education Programs, are members of the Friends of Corkscrew, and committed financial supporters of the Sanctuary. Kris chairs the Volunteer Fundraising Committee, gathers monthly Bird Count statistics, and contributes to the volunteer newsletter. Greg helps with resource management in the backcountry and, after Hurricane Wilma, brought his chainsaw to single-handedly clear the south road access to the Sanctuary. "Kris and Greg epitomize the Audubon volunteer," says Ed Carlson, Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary Director. "They give generously of their time, talents and enthusiasm to carry out the Audubon mission in Southwest Florida."



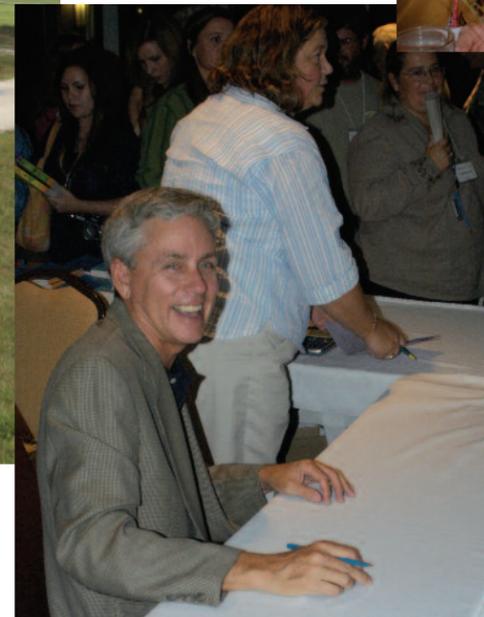
Photo by Robert Hughes

Jason Frederick (in khaki shirt and pants) of Space Coast Audubon led an Assembly field trip to the Viera Wetlands.

Senator Burt Saunders (R-Naples) was named Champion of the Everglades for his leadership on behalf of Everglades restoration and the recovery of Lake Okeechobee. Senator Saunders spearheaded legislation to start cleaning up water that flows into and out of Lake Okeechobee. The legislation comes with a commitment for \$100 million in new funds for environmental projects. Pictured with the senator at the Audubon Assembly are his wife, Lillian Love, and their sons. At far left is Eric Draper, Audubon of Florida Deputy Director of Policy, and (far right) Davld Anderson, Executive Director, Audubon of Florida.



Debbie Harrison (center) was named Conservationist of the Year at the 2007 Audubon Assembly. She has been a steadfast advocate for the Everglades and the Florida Keys. Pictured with her are her fiancé, attorney Thom Rumberger (right), and Bernie Parrish, both lobbyists with the Everglades Foundation.



Best-selling author and dedicated environmentalist Carl Hiaasen was inspiring and entertaining as the Assembly's keynote speaker. He urged Audubon members to continue their efforts to save what is left of Florida's natural lands. "Conservationists are the true soldiers in this war" to do what is right for the environment, he said. Following the talk, Hiaasen (shown with Mary Short of Corkscrew Nature Store) inscribed copies of his books.

More than 200 professionals and conservation leaders from Audubon of Florida and its chapters joined nationwide rallies November 3 urging America's decision makers to "Step It Up" by taking action to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 80% (below 1990 levels) by 2050. This significant greenhouse gas pollutant is a byproduct of transportation and electricity generation and use, and contributes to global warming.



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Audubon is deeply grateful to all the individuals, corporations, foundations and organizations whose generous contributions supported our conservation work throughout Florida during our fiscal year 2007. The following list recognizes donors from July 1, 2006 through June 30, 2007.

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We apologize for any omissions or errors on this list. Please contact the Development Dept. at 305-371-6399 to report additions or corrections.



Philanthropist of the Year Joseph T. Ambrozy

Joe Ambrozy is a life-long birder and all-around outdoorsman. When he retired to Florida in 1999 following a career as a corporate executive, he already had a strong affection for Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. He and his family had vacationed in Southwest Florida for decades, and he chose Bonita Springs as a place to retire partly so he could be near Corkscrew. There he has put in thousands of volunteer hours, participating regularly in the Sanctuary's monthly bird count, and working on its development committee.

"Joe is a leader," said Sanctuary director Ed Carlson. "He was a leader in his professional life and since retirement is a leader on the Audubon of Florida board, and among the volunteers at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. His passion for birds and the natural environment is unwavering, and that passion is backed up by dedicated service and major financial support."

Ambrozy is proud of Corkscrew's worldwide reputation as a natural jewel. When he was rafting through an eagle preserve in Alaska last summer, he was delighted when a guide, noticing his Corkscrew-emblazoned hat, asked, "How's the blue frog?" That was a reference to the rare variation of a green treefrog discovered at Corkscrew last year. Like many natural events at Corkscrew, it made news throughout the scientific and environmental communities.

To ensure that the Sanctuary, with its spectacular diversity of wildlife and its educational programs, will continue to benefit future generations, Ambrozy has made Corkscrew a beneficiary in his will, and he actively encourages others to follow his example by making bequests or charitable annuities to Audubon.

Photo by R. J. Wiley

Last Chance to Get a Tax Break on IRA Gifts to Audubon.

A tax break which makes it advantageous for people 70 1/2 years and older to make a current gift of up to \$100,000 from a traditional Individual Retirement Account (IRA) will expire at the end of 2007. The benefit to this tax break is that, while you will not get a charitable tax deduction for your IRA gift, you will avoid paying taxes on the contributed amount, which otherwise would be due upon withdrawal of funds from your IRA.

As you no doubt know, at 70 1/2 owners of IRAs must begin taking taxable distributions from their plans, as IRAs were never intended to avoid taxes, only to defer them. At 70 1/2, it is time to pay the piper. Many

people will, therefore, find it more advantageous to use an IRA as a source of charitable gifts, rather than make gifts from other resources.

If you wish to take advantage of this situation, you must make your gift before the end of 2007. The transfer of funds must be made directly by your plan administrator, as withdrawing funds from your IRA and then giving it to the charity would be treated as a taxable distribution, thereby incurring some income tax liability. Finally, this IRA rollover plan does not apply to other tax-deferred retirement plans like the 401, 403, Keogh, etc. It is always best to consult your finan-

cial advisor to discuss the impact of any major gift on your financial situation.

Also, as it is generally more advantageous to leave IRA assets to charity, and cash and stocks to family. Please consider naming Audubon as a beneficiary of a portion of the amount left in your IRA at the time of your death.

If you would like to further explore the possibility of supporting Audubon of Florida with an IRA transfer, please call David Skipp, Chief Development Officer, Audubon of Florida, at 305-371-6399 x127. Or call Audubon Vice President Wayne Mones at 212-979-3033.



ROD WILEY

What it took to get the Ghost Orchid photo

Special thanks to Rod Wiley, whose photographs regularly add great beauty to the Naturalist.

Capturing the ghost orchid at Corkscrew was an enormous challenge that Wiley resolved with pride.

"I love what I do," Wiley said, "and when Ed Carlson called me about getting a photo of the orchid, I knew how important it was to Corkscrew to get this right." It took him 28 days, 63 miles of walking, 112 hours in the field, and many more on the computer.

He stayed put under a tarp during four thunderstorms and several showers, and invented a tiedown rig to hold the camera still. "The orchid is nearly 150 feet from the boardwalk, and not real big to begin with," he recounted. "It moves up and down in the breeze and required a spotting scope to watch it, and a radio trigger to fire the camera so that my hand didn't touch the shutter button and shake the camera."

Visit www.rjwileyphoto.com to see more of Wiley's photos. Besides an Adopt-a-Bird gift, what could make a better holiday gift than a photo by R. J. Wiley?



Reddish egret white morph by Christina Evans

Largo-based photographer Christina Evans, whose work frequently graces the pages of this magazine, won a top ten spot in the North American Nature Photographers Association (NANPA) 2008 Showcase (out of over 4,200 entries) with this image of a reddish egret white morph. Christina is offering signed, archival prints of this image in two sizes: 11x17 inches for \$75, and 17x22 inches for \$120 plus shipping and handling. (Florida residents add 7% sales tax). Twenty percent of each purchase will be donated to Audubon of Florida. Visa and MasterCard accepted. For more information and to order prints, call 727-596-1051 or visit <http://cgstudios.smugmug.com> and click on the Fine Art Prints gallery.

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ADOPT-a-BIRD

Education Coordinator Teri Marks shows Ambassador Bird "Picasso," a red shouldered hawk, to student visitors at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey. Photo by Susie Warren

Audubon Welcomes New Professional Staff

Julie Hill, Everglades Policy Associate, oversees pre-Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) projects (like modified water deliveries), works on growth management issues, and organizes grassroots efforts. Julie earned a JD from the University of Miami School of Law in 2006 and is a member of the Florida Bar. Among her many activities, she served as president of the UM School of Law's Environmental Law Society.

Megan Tinsley, Everglades Science Coordinator, focuses on coordinating technical support to the policy team to achieve Everglades restoration goals throughout the ecosystem. In 2007 Megan will complete an M.A. in Marine Affairs and Policy from the University of Miami Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science. She holds a B.S. in biological sciences from the University of Tennessee. She was research assistant/water quality consortium coordinator at the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation Marine Laboratory, and did an internship at the J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge in Sanibel.

Grants Manager Michelle Frankel, Ph.D., manages Audubon of Florida's foundation and government grants. Her experience includes raising \$1.4 million in proposals to National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Education, and private foundations on behalf of universities and non-profits in South Florida and has also raised significant funds from federal and state agencies, private foundations, and corporations. Michelle holds a Ph.D. in biology from Boston University. She directed The Boston Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, and has worked on environmental education and advocacy programs with The Nature Conservancy, Earthspan, The Tel Aviv University and Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel.

Wishing you joyous holidays and a healthy, happy New Year.

Audubon of Florida Staff

Audubon of Florida State Office

444 Brickell Avenue, Suite 850
Miami, FL 33131
(305) 371-6399 (305) 371-6398 Fax
David E. Anderson, Executive Director
David Skipp, Chief Development Officer
Dory Ahearn, Development Assistant
Jacqueline Cohen, Everglades Team Leader
Michael England, State Finance & Budget Manager
Michelle Frankel, Ph D, Grants & Govt. Contracts Manager
Susan Fortunow, State Administrator Manager
T Grand, Communications Director
Julie Hill, Everglades Policy Associate
Vicky Johnston, Donor Relations Coordinator
Wendy Martinez, Contracts & Payables Coord.
Lisa Reichert, Office Assistant
Sarah Ridley, Administrative Assistant
Traci Romine, Policy & Communications Advisor
Megan Tinsley, Everglades Ecosystem Science Coordinator

Tallahassee Office

2507 Callaway Road, Suite 103
Tallahassee, FL 32303
(850) 222-2473 (850) 224-6056 Fax
Eric Draper, Deputy Director/Policy Director
Brian Chunmey, Policy Assistant
Jacqueline Sulek, Chapter Coordinator
Julie Wraithmell, Wildlife Policy Coordinator
Linda Macbeth, West Bay Audubon Center Project Manager

Tavernier Science Center

115 Indian Mound Trail
Tavernier, FL 33070
(305) 852-5092 (305) 852-8012 Fax
Jerome Lorenz, Ph D, State Dir. of Research
Brian Banks, Biologist
Lucille Canavan, Office Manager
Luis Canedo, Research Associate
Christian Chauvin, Field Technician
Greg Ellis, Biologist
Peter Frezza, Research Coordinator
Stephanie Hurder, Field Technician
Ben Lieb, Field Technician
Gary Mosley, Grants & Finance Assistant
Brennan Mulrooney, Field Technician
Michelle Robinson, Biologist
Shawn Liston, Ph D, Senior Scientist
Nicole Katin, Field Technician
Brynne Langan, Research Associate

Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries

410 Ware Blvd., Suite 702
Tampa, FL 33619
(813) 623-6826 (813) 623-4086 Fax
Ann Hodgson, Ph D, Gulf Coast Ecosystem Science Coordinator
Ann Paul, Tampa Bay Area Regional Coordinator
Mark Rachal, Field Biologist

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary

375 Sanctuary Road West
Naples, FL 34120
(239) 348-9151 (239) 348-9155 Fax
Ed Carlson, Sanctuary Director
Henry Bailey, Building Caretaker
Rebecca Beck, Director of Education
Brad Cornell, Big Cypress Ecosystem Policy Associate
Steven Corriveau, Maintenance Supervisor
Candace Forsyth, Donor Relations Coordinator PT
Paul Gootkin, Asst. Nature Store Manager
Mike Knight, Resource Management Specialist
Jason Lauritsen, Assistant Director
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Part time: Julia Askey, Bethany Summeralls, Vanessa Morris, Sales Associates;
Roger Barry, Marshall Dunlap, Gerald Griggs, Mike Shunney, Amy Wiggins, Admissions Associates;
Mary Ann Summeralls, Store Associate
Allyson Webb, Resource Manager PIMB

Ahhochee Hill

Christie Anderberg, Manager
24268 Lake Lindsey Road
Brooksville, FL 34601
(352) 797-3545

Keys Environmental Restoration Fund

Jeanette Hobbs, Manager
11399 Overseas Highway, Suite 4E
Marathon, FL 33050
(305) 289-9988 (305) 289-0073 Fax

Audubon Center for Birds of Prey

1101 Audubon Way, Maitland, FL 32751
(407) 644-0190 (407) 644-8940 Fax
(407) 539-5700 (407) 539-5701 Fax
Katie Gill Warner, Center Administrator
Charles Lee, Director of Advocacy
Maggie DeVane, Interim Center Administrator
Dianna Flynt, Rehabilitation Supervisor
Beth Evans Lott, Raptor Clinic Technician
Samantha Stock, Raptor Clinic Technician
Robert Veal, Raptor Rehab Technician
Lynda White, EagleWatch Coordinator

Lake Okeechobee Campaign

100 Riverwood Circle
Lorida, FL 33857
(863) 655-1831 (863) 655-1831 Fax
Paul Gray, Ph D, Science Coordinator
Lake Okeechobee Watershed