



FLORIDA Audubon Naturalist

SPRING 2011



Amazing Migrations

(Sc+Po)+Adv=R

Science plus Policy plus Advocacy equals Results

Volunteers in Action

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**John Elting, Chairman,
Florida Audubon Society**

conducting a Fakahatchee Swamp walk

Photo courtesy of Lance Shearer, Naples Daily News

Assuming the role of chairman of Florida Audubon Society has been both rewarding and challenging. We have relatively new leadership at the state level, under the sound direction of Florida Executive Director Eric Draper, and a recently enlisted National Audubon President David Yarnold. Together, we are all working on creating a stronger and more unified Audubon to focus on the enormous environmental challenges facing Florida and beyond. This involves tapping the passion and commitment of our 44 Florida Audubon Chapters with more than 35,000 members, utilizing the wisdom and expertise of our 29-member Florida Audubon Society Board, and leading our talented team of 60 Florida employees to support Audubon's mission to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on wildlife and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and earth's biological diversity by use of education, science and policy. Together, we are making progress in moving our conservation priorities forward.

This edition of the *Naturalist* focuses on many of the ingredients that make Audubon of Florida successful. The feature on *Science, Policy & Advocacy = Results* includes short summaries of a few of Audubon's notable projects that are making a positive impact. Our signature approach to conservation issues has been to prepare sound science, create thoughtful policy, and advocate the direction needed to achieve the most positive environmental outcomes.

Another ingredient for Audubon's success has been citizen engagement. The feature on *Volunteers in Action* showcases how individuals throughout Florida have donated time as citizen scientists (such as Bird Stewards and EagleWatchers), operated centers, advocated before elected and appointed bodies, served as expert communicators and donated supplies and funding to support Audubon's work. The Restore Florida Bay and Save Florida's State Parks projects are just two great examples of how we are using the social media to engage thousands more Floridians for immediate action on environmental issues.

Finally, the piece on *Amazing Migrations* reminds us that protecting our water supplies, restoring important habitat areas and addressing climate change does not stop at the Florida border. We need to understand the global context in which we do our conservation work. Florida's efforts must support broader conservation goals such as protection of the Atlantic Flyway.

We hope this edition inspires each of you to get engaged in a bigger way. With the conservation challenges ahead, we need your help as a volunteer, advocate, communicator and donor. Contact us at (305) 371-6399 or mspontak@audubon.org if you are looking for a way to get more involved with Audubon of Florida.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JOHN ELTING". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

John Elting
Chairman, Florida Audubon Society

John Elting is a retired investment banker and entrepreneur who began his career with Goldman, Sachs & Co. After retiring, he obtained certificates from the University of Florida Master Naturalist program in Freshwater Wetlands and Upland Habitats. For the past seven years, Mr. Elting has led individuals, conservation groups and university students as an interpretive naturalist in the Big Cypress and other south Florida wilderness areas.

Amazing Migrations:

Following the Paths of Florida's Migratory Birds



A Message from Executive Director Eric Draper

Taking advantage of our wonderful winter weather, I have migrated my body, mind and binoculars around Florida to visit friends, contributors and some of the state's special places. Following the same advice given to others, I take friends, family and colleagues to Florida's parks, wildlife refuges and sanctuaries, record my visits with photos and written notes, and share those experiences on social media sites.

Everywhere, I am reminded that our state is made a rich place to visit because of the variety of birds. My favorite trip included a stop at Everglades National Park, where I shared my binoculars with a group of young European tourists who were fascinated to see a great horned owl.

Everywhere, I am also reminded of how much people value Florida's natural beauty. And I wonder what we can do to convert that appreciation into conservation action. Our parks and other public lands are a legacy handed down by those who worked to protect special places and get them into public ownership. The question we face is how to be a steward of this natural heritage.

Two recent events provided evidence that citizens will stand up for the places that make Florida special. A proposal to close 53 Florida state parks brought on a sense of public indignation. A second proposal to build golf courses in state parks received an even more righteous response. Both proposals were abandoned within a week of becoming public and after Audubon volunteers and staff stood up and got busy taking stands for the threatened parks.

Led by former Florida Audubon Society President Clay Henderson, writer Lucy Tobias and local Audubon chapter leaders — and using social media tools, such as Facebook, to share information — the "53 Parks in 53 Days" campaign generated widespread interest in some of Florida's most beautiful but underused parks.

Having spent much of the past two decades pushing initiatives to protect the places that make Florida special, I now worry most about stewardship of the lands in public ownership. The answer is getting more people to enjoy our public lands and the water and wildlife spectacles found there. We care when we know and have personal experience with places.

That is why I am asking you — our members, chapters, friends and the public — to migrate with me to public lands. Here are three things you can do:

- Visit a state park, national wildlife refuge or other public lands.
- Take others with you — friends, family, kids and adults. Hike, canoe, bicycle and birdwatch.
- Take pictures, write about your visit and use Audubon of Florida's social media web sites to share your experiences (<http://www.facebook.com/FloridasSpecialPlaces> and the Audubon of Florida news blog at <http://www.Audubonof-FloridaNews.org>.)

This is really a case of "use it or lose it." By using our public lands you help to create a constituency. Decision-makers at all levels of government need to hear that people who live in and visit Florida want places where they can experience natural Florida and all the gifts we have inherited.

One final request: In this issue of the *Florida Naturalist*, we celebrate some of the people whose efforts and gifts have created a conservation legacy. Please join those whose legacy gifts allow Audubon to keep working for our wildlife and protecting the land and water they need to survive. Your gifts to Audubon really do make a difference.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Eric Draper". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Audubon of Florida Staff (L to R): Megan Tinsley, Mac Stone, Dr. Jerry Lorenz, Erin Woods, Michelle Robinson, Heather Schorge and Eric Draper viewing habitat restoration work conducted by Audubon's Keys Environmental Restoration Fund (KERF) at Dagny Johnson Key Largo Hammock Botanical State Park.



After the 2011 Legislature will Florida be the Same?



Workers install one of the 190,000 mirrors at Florida Power & Light Company's Martin Next Generation Solar Energy Center in Indiantown, Fla. The plant which opened in March created 1,000 direct jobs during construction.

(Photo by Doug Murray/
FPL)

Audubon and conservationists around Florida were recently successful in eliminating a proposal to allow golf courses in state parks.

Conservation leaders have shifted strategies from a primary focus on preserving natural Florida to preserving the rules and laws that protect our state's water and wildlife habitat.

Now that the reality of a new Legislature and Governor is settling across the state, advocates for almost every government program are asking if Florida will ever be the same. Earnest efforts to cripple the effectiveness of all government sponsored programs – including growth management and environmental preservation – appear headed for approval. Sadly the support is based on a flawed idea – that somehow the goal of clean water and abundant wildlife is a barrier to new jobs.

Audubon has long been viewed favorably in Tallahassee as the conservation group proposing solutions. Now we find ourselves as the opposition. Where we have proposed clean

energy, public lands and water for the environment, now we are opposing laws that will enshrine the right to pollute and to develop currently protected wetlands and shorelines.

Nevertheless, working with allies and deploying our grassroots membership, we are giving a voice to Florida conservation in the state's capital.

Here is where our work is focused:

Energy: We are pushing proposals that would allow utilities to build more of the solar fields that are now generating 110 megawatts of solar energy in three Florida locations.

Water: Florida's rivers, lakes, springs, wetlands and coastal waters are again at risk as developers rewrite rules to unravel decades of good environmental regulation. Laws currently on the books to limit septic tanks, fertilizer use and conversion of wetlands are all slated for repeal or substantial reversion.

Everglades and Lake Okeechobee: Long Audubon's top ecosystem priority, the Everglades has finally met a Governor indifferent to the value of restoring this American treasure. Gov. Rick Scott has proposed a plan that within two years will reduce the state's budget for the Everglades to a fraction of

what is currently needed. Key programs and projects to clean up the Everglades and Lake Okeechobee are expected to fall by the wayside, leaving no recourse for cleanup except through federal courts (Audubon has long been an intervenor in federal Everglades lawsuits.)

Wildlife: Developers are blaming gopher tortoises and panthers for the state's poor housing market. Fortunately, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's constitutional authority provides some cover for these essential wildlife protections, if not the agency's budget. Scott's budget proposal, for example, would completely eliminate FWC's Office of Recreation Services, home to the Great Florida Birding Trail, the state's major marketer in support of Florida's \$3 billion annual wildlife viewing economy.

Land Conservation and Management: Florida Forever, the state's acclaimed land conservation program is zeroed out in the governor's budget proposal. Audubon is pushing for continued land management dollars to keep public land open and available for people and for wildlife.

Growth Management: With the Governor, Senate President and House Speaker all publicly putting the Department of Community Affairs in their crosshairs, major changes to Florida's growth management laws are afoot. Delegating much of the state review to cities and counties is being proposed to "streamline" this review on the premise that local communities know better than the state what they need. At the same time, legislation is moving quickly to preempt local government ability to enforce environmental laws such as fertilizer bans and wetlands protection laws.

Your part: Audubon deploys a talented team of conservation staff and volunteers to keep you informed and to lobby the Legislature. Your part is to read our online materials and respond to our calls for grassroots action. Go to www.AudubonofFlorida.org and push the *Take Action* button. By signing up to participate in Audubon's Florida Conservation Network you will get regular legislative updates. You can also become a friend of Audubon of Florida on Facebook.

Leaving A Legacy

Mary Ida and Carl Yost

Legacy gifts can be designated to Florida Audubon Society Endowment. Gifts to support our conservation work go to Audubon of Florida. All gifts support our One Audubon vision for Florida conservation.

Carl and Mary Ida Yost have been visiting Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary near Naples since the 1970s, when the center had a little stand at the entrance and a shanty house for restrooms.

Mary Ida, a former professor of music and concert organist at Eastern Michigan University, is a life list birder. Her husband Carl, a retired engineer and safety supervisor for Ford Motor Company, is an avid nature photographer.

The couple describes Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary as “our absolute favorite birding place. It is a magical place that provides access to visitors in a way that preserves the swamp,” explained Mary Ida. “The Sanctuary Director Ed Carlson inspired us to leave a lasting legacy.”

One day, Mary Ida heard there were Painted Buntings in the park, a bird she still did not have on her list. She sat for hours on her small portable stool at the feeder where she was told she might find these magnificently colored birds. Finally, she saw a flash of bright green, followed by a flash of magenta, and a female bunting, followed immediately by a male, landed



*Carl and Mary Ida Yost at Corkscrew Sanctuary
Photo by Mary Short*

right before her eyes. She says she will never forget that very special moment. That day, Mary Ida and Carl started planning an endowment to protect the bird habitat at the swamp and educate people, young and old, about how important it is to protect this internationally acclaimed resource.

By funding the Carl and Mary Ida Yost Birding Education and Bird Habitat Endowment Fund, the couple can see results during their lifetime from the interest, such as the feeders just outside the Blair Education Center, as well as have a designated fund for a bequest they have placed in their will. They hope others with similar interests will contribute to this fund, too.

Are you are interested in supporting Audubon’s mission to conserve birds and their habitats? Contact Margaret Hankin-Spontak, at (352) 229-2887 or mspontak@audubon.org.

Tax-wise Giving in 2011 By Grace Allison, Tax Strategist, The Northern Trust Company - Submitted by West McCann, President, Northern Trust - Bonita Springs

With the passage of the 2010 Tax Relief Act last December, nature lovers have two more opportunities to receive tax benefits while supporting their favorite charities.

IRA Charitable Rollover

The tax law requires those 70 ½ and older to take annual minimum distributions from their traditional Individual Retirement Accounts. Congress has extended, through 2011, a provision allowing direct distributions from a traditional IRA to a public charity (such as Florida Audubon Society) of up to \$100,000 annually.

You can direct your IRA custodian to transfer part or all of your required minimum distribution to charity — tax-free. To the extent your IRA distributions are directed to charity, they are not taxed to you. If you wish to transfer more than your required minimum distribution, that’s okay too, as long as you don’t exceed the \$100,000 annual maximum. Distributions count toward satisfying your 2011 required minimum distribution.

Qualified Conservation Contribution

For federal income tax purposes, contributions of real property to charity are generally capped at 30 percent of the donor’s adjusted gross income, with a five-year excess contribution carryover. These limitations can get tight for those wishing to preserve a significant piece of real estate for conservation purposes, in some cases depriving them of a full charitable deduction. Now Congress has extended, through 2011, a provision that increases the 30 percent deduction cap to 50 percent and the five-year deduction carryover to 15 years — but only for “qualified conservation contributions.” Special provisions allow a deduction up to 100 percent of adjusted gross income for farmers and ranchers who make a

“qualified conservation contribution” of their farm or ranch lands.

In order to qualify as a “qualified conservation contribution,” real estate must be contributed for a qualified conservation purpose, such as the protection of natural habitat for wildlife (including birds) or the preservation of open space for the scenic enjoyment of the general public. One popular type of qualified conservation contribution is the conservation easement, which restricts for perpetuity the future use of the underlying property.

Your income tax charitable deduction would be based on the difference between (i) the value of the property without the easement, and (ii) the value of the property with the easement. The easement must be granted to a governmental entity (such as a forest preserve) or charity that will monitor the ongoing use of the underlying property. The goal is to ensure that the property is indeed used for the purposes for which the easement was granted.

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(Sc+Po)+Adv=R

Science plus Policy plus Advocacy equals Results

"Our board has directed us to follow a path from science to policy to advocacy and results. This strategic approach has resulted in the following successful conservation outcomes."

Eric Draper, Executive Director

Northern Everglades – A Win-Win Story

The Lake Okeechobee Watershed — really the Northern Everglades — is in serious decline. The major problems are water pollution and an overly drained landscape that dumps billions of gallons of nutrient-laden water on the Everglades and coastal waters. Cleaning up the phosphorus pollution in Lake Okeechobee and its tributaries is critical to Everglades restoration.

In 2007, scientists from Audubon studied the South Florida Water Management District's (SFWMD) plans for water storage in this region to address water level management and water quality improvement. Audubon issued a report declaring that the planned level of storage would not be adequate to meet water quality goals for the watershed. After a multi-agency study later that year, the group found they in fact needed three to four times the storage. That finding led to an innovative and cost-effective approach that has been aggressively promoted by Audubon.

Audubon policy staff advocated for the use of private ranch

lands for water storage and treatment. Working with private landowners to attain water management goals is the proverbial win-win situation. It is faster and cheaper than large structural features, land stays in production and on the tax rolls, and citizens and wildlife benefit from habitat improvements. Through Audubon's advocacy, funding for such projects through SFWMD was doubled from \$4.2 to \$8.8 million, and participation has grown from eight landowners in the pilot to 190 landowners getting in line to participate.

In February, after years of collaborative work with one of the region's largest ranchers, SFWMD agreed to lease land to store an astounding 33,860 acre-feet of water in Nicodemus Slough on 16,000 acres adjacent to Lake Okeechobee from Lykes Bros. This new public partnership with Lykes Ranch will help the company sustain its cattle business while helping restore the Everglades. SFWMD board members and Lykes CEO Howell Fergu-

son credited Audubon staff for developing the support for, and interest in, this important project. This is one giant step towards the restoration of the Northern Everglades.



Photo by Fred Lopez

The Endangered Snail Kite – A Temporary Solution

Everglades Snail Kite populations have declined from about 3,000 birds 10 years ago to less than 700 today, reflecting changes in the species' two most critical habitats. The degradation of the Water Conservation Areas and Lake Okeechobee from unnatural fluctuations in water levels, coupled with water management changes to accommodate urban and agricultural water needs, have crippled kite nesting efforts. In order to address this population decline, Audubon turned its attention to the few areas where breeding attempts continue, especially Lake Tohopekaliga (Toho) in Osceola County. With conditions this dire, unusual remedies are needed.

Researchers discovered that nesting kites on Toho were more successful when they could eat exotic apple snails, which were found in hydrilla, an exotic weed.



Photo by RJ Wiley

When hydrilla was killed by plant managers to improve boating access, it also greatly reduced snails and thus kite nesting success. Armed with this information, Audubon scientists and policy staff successfully supported an adaptive approach of sustaining the hydrilla/snail habitat during kite nesting, until populations recover, while maintaining boat trails and fishing holes to sustain the tourism industry. Audubon advocates for the removal of exotic species where possible, and protecting the snails and hydrilla is only a temporary remedy for Snail Kite survival.

Audubon will also continue working to stabilize conditions in all kite habitat to bring this iconic species back from the brink.

Florida Panther Protection: Expanding Their Habitat

Once down to 30 individuals, the endangered Florida panther has rebounded to saturate its only occupied breeding habitat with 100 to 160 cats, all south of the Caloosahatchee River. Thanks partly to the success of a genetic restoration effort in the mid-1990s, the 2.5 million acre site is full and the cats are seeking new lands to continue on the path to recovery. Much of this success is also due to 10 years of collaboration amongst Audubon, including Collier County Audubon Society, two other conservation groups and major private landowners of panther habitat. They have formalized this as the Florida Panther Protection Program (FPPP), which incentivizes landowners to protect and restore habitat and wetlands in exchange for enhanced development rights on highly degraded farmlands. The habitat and farms were mapped up front using best science. For details, visit www.FloridaPantherProtection.com.

By virtue of this collaboration, Audubon and its allies have not only established a working relationship with these Southwest Florida landowners, but are setting the stage for panther recovery in expanded regions absolutely vital for survival. Without building the goodwill and economic interest of communities and major landowners in future dispersal locations for panthers throughout Florida

and the southeast U.S., as required by the science-based Panther Recovery Plan, the species will be doomed to live south of the Caloosahatchee River, always teetering on the brink of extinction.

Complementing this incentive-based collaboration is a new proposal by Interior Secretary Ken Salazar to establish or expand National Wildlife Refuges from the Kissimmee River to the Big Cypress Swamp, including adding tens of thousands of acres to the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge. Audubon and its FPPP allies are in the vanguard of advocacy for this proposal, along with The Nature Conservancy. To read more about these programs, visit www.fws.gov/southeast/greatereverglades.



Photo by RJ Wiley

Wood Storks – Conserving Shallow Wetlands

For decades, wetlands protection has ranked high on Audubon's list of conservation goals for Florida. Drastic losses of wetlands due to development have imperiled the Wood Stork and other wading birds, especially in their South Florida range. Audubon science staff has been tracking the nesting success of the largest and historically most productive stork nesting colony in the United States since 1958, marking the decline and instability of this important colony. An analysis of this nesting data, a study of Wood Stork foraging in Southwest Florida and a mapping effort to quantify habitat losses over time has led to a number of conservation, science and policy recommendations. While these recommendations will help to stabilize and recover the endangered Wood Stork population, they also advance our broader goal of ecosystem restoration by addressing a critical need for more and healthier shallow wetlands.

Audubon research has identified the loss of more than 82 percent of the shallow, wet prairie habitat within the critical foraging area of the Wood Stork colony at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary in Collier County. Our study suggests that wet

prairies are important to foraging storks early in the nesting season (November and December). Our analysis of regulations to assess development impacts to wetlands and Wood Storks has revealed

inadequacies in the science and methods used by state and federal agencies. Critical wetland functions tied to hydrology and the implications for Wood Stork foraging, were being overlooked.

Audubon's science-driven recommendations stemming from the study of Wood Storks and wetland losses has resulted in the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's consideration of changes in their wetland permitting reviews. A number of Audubon's recommendations for shallow wetland protection are also being adopted by the South Florida Water Management District. Wood Stork and wetland science continue to drive our efforts in South Florida, in our work in the private sector, as well as with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and the Army Corps of Engineers. The end result should be better protection of wetland values, true mitigation of impacts to wetland functions, restoration of early nesting season foraging habitat and, in the end, sustainable nesting at Corkscrew's Wood Stork colony.



Photo by RJ Wiley

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EagleWatch Foster Program: A Conservation Success Story

Bald Eagles, which are among the largest birds in North America, suffered drastic declines in numbers in the 1950s due to the insecticide DDT. Today, they are a successful example that protection under the Endangered Species Act works.

With more than 1,200 nesting pairs, Florida has one of the largest populations of Bald Eagles in the contiguous United States, excluding Alaska. Each year, Audubon Center for Birds of Prey treats approximately 50 to 60 Bald Eagles due to injuries related to human-wildlife interface. Of those admitted, a number are young eagles and eaglets that have been displaced from their nests.

Audubon EagleWatch program and the Center's rehabilitation work links directly to this species' success. One of the functions of EagleWatch is to rescue eagles that have fallen from their nests due to storms or other factors. Citizen scientists in the field are the best resource for getting the young eagles back into the wild.

If returning eaglets back to their original nests is not an option, Center staff, along with Audubon EagleWatch, place eaglets into foster nests. This process includes an assessment of nest history, the location of a potential nest with a sibling of the same age and the accessibility of the nest. To date, the Center has had an unprecedented 100 percent success rate in fostering eaglets into new

Audubon's Gulf Oil Response

Florida provides a crucial habitat for several species of imperiled beach nesting birds, such as Least Terns, Snowy Plovers, Black Skimmers and American Oystercatchers. During the Gulf Oil Crisis, our scientists quickly realized, through careful observation that it was not just the oil itself that threatened these and other species, but the zealous official (and sometimes unofficial) response to the spill. As workers searched for and cleaned the beaches of oil, expanded pedestrian and vehicle traffic through sensitive nesting areas may have caused an even greater impact on bird populations in Florida than the oil itself.

Audubon quickly prioritized activities that helped ensure these birds had as successful a breeding season as possible elsewhere in the state. Florida's chicks will be an important contribution to the larger Gulf populations of these birds. While many others interested in volunteering sat idle for lack of official opportunities, Audubon recruited volunteers through our website and deployed them as citizen scientists to post beach habitat for sensitive species and reach out and educate the public.

Audubon volunteers were plugged

Photo by RJ Wiley



into existing bird stewarding programs to provide expanded beach protection for nesting bird colonies. Volunteers helped make sure all the beach nesting bird colonies in Panhandle state parks were posted with signs and symbolic fencing, to protect them as much from beachgoers as from the trucks and other heavy equipment traversing our beaches in search of tar balls that in many cases never arrived.

This breeding season, stewarding groups are expanding to cover new areas, and our new staff member in Northwest Florida, as well as our new Important Bird Areas coordinator (see page 14 for bios), are providing the much needed capacity for these efforts. With our foot on the gas, we are doing a rapid assessment of Gulf Important Bird Areas in Florida, and using this and other information to inform our priorities for acquisition and restoration funding coming to Florida as a result of the disaster.



Photo by Christina Evans



Photo by Mac Stone

Audubon launches www.RestoreFloridaBay.com

Audubon of Florida's new campaign website at www.RestoreFloridaBay.com will launch April 15th. The site connects citizens, decisionmakers and donors with Audubon's critical work at its Tavernier Science Center in the Florida Keys.

Mac Stone, field technician at Audubon's Tavernier Science Center, is the talent behind the beautiful images and creative videos on the new website. This site, made possible by funds from Disney's Worldwide Conservation Fund, provides visitors with a behind-the-scenes tour of the research at the Tavernier Science Center. The first in a series of videos features Roseate Spoonbill nest production, a key component of a conceptual

ecological model developed by Audubon scientists. Data analysis, funded by Disney, will help support science-based recommendations on restoring the Southern Everglades and Florida Bay. The website, through its stunning imagery and videos by Mac, will serve as the tool to connect people and inspire them to advocate for a healthy Florida Bay.

Mac is a distinguished Florida photographer with a passion for nature, appearing in the Florida Forever Conservation Photography calendars for the past three years. A Florida native, Mac enjoys capturing the beauty of Florida's special places in his work in order to promote their conservation. After grueling

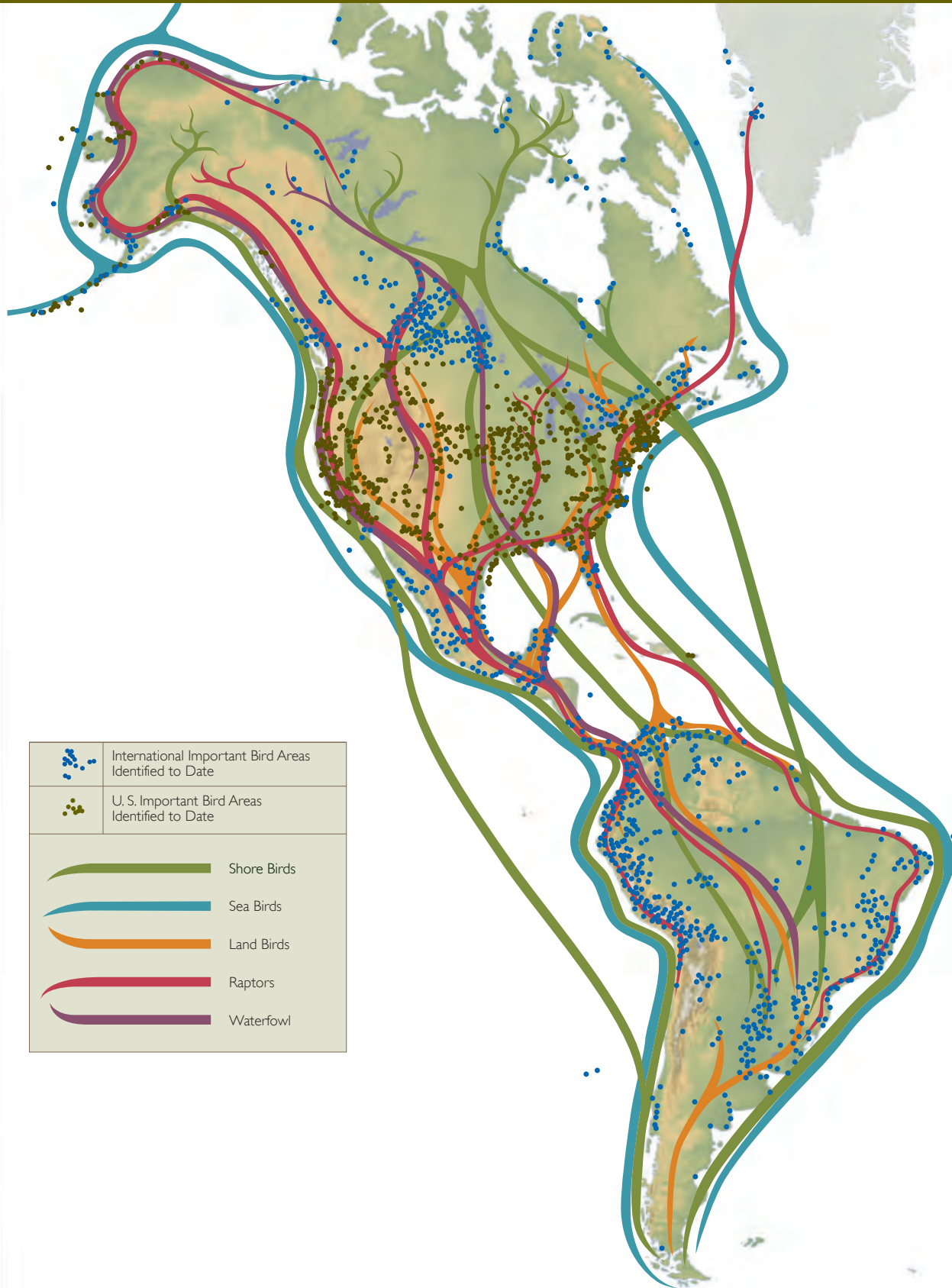
days in the field collecting fish data in the southern Everglades for his day job, Mac can be found rushing to capture a great sunset over Florida Bay or editing his current photography project late into the night. His last project, *The Secret Life of Burrowing Owls*, was recently featured on National Public Radio's Science Friday program.



Mac's experience ranges from teaching photography and environmental science to underprivileged children in Honduras to foster pride in their at-risk ecosystems to giving photography lessons to children at a Wyoming ranch to connect them with nature. Mac has also documented the impacts of the oil industry on mammals in Ecuadorian rainforests for the Wildlife Conservation Society. Mac's work has been published in *National Geographic Traveler* and other magazines. Visit his website at www.macstonephoto.com.

Amazing Migrations

Birds do not recognize state lines and neither does Audubon. As a result, our eastern state offices and our partners are working around a new organizing concept: The Atlantic Flyway Initiative. Focusing on the birds of three habitat types initially (beach, salt-marsh and forest), interdisciplinary and multi-state projects are emerging with a common long-term goal to conserve birds in the flyway. Migration is not only a meaningful conservation construct; it captures our imagination and inspires us, reminding us of the mysteries still abundant in the natural world.



A Few Amazing Florida Migrants

Swallow-tailed Kite

Southwest Florida is one of the best places to enjoy this spectacular raptor, as they cast off their ordinarily solitary ways and form large feeding and roosting flocks at staging areas on their migration. They use the peer pressure to work up the nerve to cross the Florida Straits to Cuba and then hop over to the Yucatan. A naturally perilous migration to southern Brazil and Paraguay takes its toll on the birds' numbers, often from harsh weather and stamina-sapping headwinds.



Photo by RJ Wiley

Warblers

Florida's coasts become a river of warblers every fall and spring, as the last land before long overwater southbound flights to Latin America, and the first land upon their return. Some of these birds, like Northern Parulas, breed here in Florida, while others return to the northeast and Canada. As a connector



Photo by Christina Evans

between breeding grounds and wintering grounds, Florida's habitat is invaluable to these endurance migrants, for the opportunity to rest and refuel that we provide. This parula is shown perched on a flatwoods plum.



Photo by Christina Evans

Piping Plover

Diminutive and declining Piping Plovers spend their winters in Florida among other places, but discrepancies between counts on the breeding grounds and wintering grounds suggest thousands of birds are wintering in mystery locations. As a result, Audubon chapters in Florida have become stalwarts in the Mid-winter Shorebird

Survey, conducted every February, as well as the International Piping Plover Survey, which was conducted this winter. Volunteers surveyed previously unsurveyed islands in the Bahamas and found nearly 1,000 wintering Piping Plovers.

Sandhill Crane

While Florida Sandhill Cranes breed in Florida, their numbers swell in the winter with visiting Sandhill Cranes from the north. Frequenting shallow wetlands in the prairie heart of Central Florida, the trumpeting call of these social birds cuts through the early morning fog as they disperse from roost sites to forage in pastures and grasslands.



Photo by Mac Stone

Swainson Hawk

These birds are rare visitors to Florida on migration. On February 11, 2011, Audubon Center for Birds of Prey received this unusual raptor found in Long Boat Key, and transported it to a rehabilitation center in Marathon. The bird was severely emaciated and extremely off-course from a typical migration route for Swainson Hawks. The Center received the bird to assist with flight conditioning. He has gained weight and has now been transferred to our rehabilitation mews for evaluation. Staff plans to release him in the Florida Keys.



Photo by Susie Warren

White Pelican

These large snow-white pelicans breed in the upper Midwest and Canada, but like many other Canadians, retreat to Florida and other warmer climes each winter. On migration, they are well known for circling in perfect synchrony on warm air thermals high above the land. Instead of plunging from heights like their brown cousins, white pelicans feed while paddling on the water's surface, cooperatively herding schools of fish until all the pelicans pounce simultaneously.



Photo by Christina Evans

Stay-at-home Birds

Of course not all of Florida's birds of interest are long distance migrants or migrants at all. Audubon's Atlantic Flyway Initiative does not mean that staff will care any less about Florida species that stay here all year-round. Here are a few Florida non-migratory favorites.

Snowy Plover

These ghost-colored shorebirds breed and winter in Florida's Panhandle and Southwest beaches, struggling to successfully fledge young from their solitary nests when faced with the crush of disturbance from beachgoers. Bird stewards are working diligently to improve their outlook. Recent surveys suggest little more than 400 Snowy Plovers remain in Florida.



Photo by Christina Evans

Southeastern American Kestrel

While kestrels from further north spend their winters with us here in Florida, our state has its own population of kestrels born and bred here. However, they're declining by many accounts as a result of lack of tree cavities for nesting. Projects like Alachua Audubon's kestrel box program are helping to contribute to the long-term sustainability of this species.



Photo by Susie Warren



Photo by RJ Wiley

Reddish Egret

This year-round resident is a focus of Audubon research at Tavernier Science Center in the Florida Keys, and stewardship activities by Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries in Tampa Bay. Whether in their red or white morph plumage, their characteristic "dancing" behavior when hunting is unmistakable.



Photo by Christina Evans

Florida Scrub-jay

Florida's only endemic bird (meaning it is found nowhere else in the world), the Florida Scrub-jay depends upon high and dry scrub, the historic preferred habitat of coastal condos, inland subdivisions and orange groves. Dwindling, this bird is listed as federally threatened. Many Audubon chapters participate in regular jay watch censuses to track the status of these cooperative breeders.



Mark your calendars for the 2011 Assembly in Lake Mary, Florida

- Birding field trips
- Guest speakers
- Learning sessions
- Network with chapters, educators, environmentalists
- 2012 conservation priorities

Audubon Assembly
October 14-15, 2011
Lake Mary Marriott

Up-to-date information at www.audubonofflorida.news.org

The Orlando Marriott Lake Mary is a Palm One designated Florida Green Lodging hotel.



Volunteers in Action

Coastal Islands Volunteers Remove Deadly Fishing Lines

Each October, volunteer boat captains and their crews coordinated by Audubon's Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries, Tampa Bay Watch and Sarasota Bay Watch visit bird nesting islands and foraging habitats in West Central Florida's estuaries, lakes and rivers to remove fishing line and other trash that poses an entanglement threat to birds and other wildlife. A



*Bowlees Creek Clean Up Bay Buddies
Photo by Rusty Chinnis*

Saturday in October with a high tide is chosen because this is the only time of the year when almost no birds are nesting on the bird colony sites in this region of Florida, so volunteers can remove the deadly line, balloon ribbon, lures and other fishing gear snagged in mangrove trees and saltmarsh habitats without endangering chicks or eggs in the nest or frightening fledgling birds. The higher tides mean that boats can approach islands surrounded by shallow water, seagrass and mudflats, and oysterbeds safely.

Approximately 50 captains led their crews in Tampa Bay, Boca Ciega Bay, Clearwater Harbor, St. Joseph Sound and Terra Ceia Bay, and ten captains and crews removed material in Sarasota Bay. Fishing line is hard to spot, entangled in the mangroves and washed up on marsh and beach shorelines, but it is a clear hazard to wading birds. Nesting pelicans and egrets sometimes even deliberately collect it, mistaking it for the softer grass materials they use to line their nests. Once a leg or wing is entangled in the line, it becomes a remorseless killer. A single long line stretching across a bird island can persist for years, entangling many birds. Audubon and Tampa Bay Watch began the fishing line cleanup in 1993 after a sobering survey at Passage Key National Wildlife Refuge at the mouth of Tampa Bay, where staff found over 50 dead birds snared in fishing line. Sarasota Bay Watch, a newly formed group, has been a fishing line cleanup partner with Audubon for two years.

Roy Hyatt Environmental Center: Reaching Thousands of Children and Adults

Volunteers from the Francis M. Weston Audubon Society, located in Pensacola, support a special environmental education center located on a 120-acre pine forest. Close to 12,000 students and over 1,000 adults participated in programs either at the Center or in the classroom last year (2009-10). This year, even though the naturalist is only working part-time, the Center has already seen about 3,500 students.



Morris Clark, on left, and Richard Mason, on right, setting a botanical information sign on one of the nature trails at RHEC

Over 400 volunteer hours were logged last year, not including the hundreds of hours spent on managing grant funds and conducting administrative activities. Volunteers provided bird seed to targeted schools for window platform feeders, maintained the bird bus and hummingbird meadow areas, posted new plant information signs and assisted in environmental encounters on the weekends. These included owl prowls, cookouts and a week-long summer environmental encounters camp. Audubon volunteers have also trained seven folks to provide care for non-releaseable Eastern Screech Owls.



*Jim Lott delivers a foster eaglet to a nest.
Photo by Kathy Finnerty*

Center for Birds of Prey Volunteers: Specials Gifts from Generous People

With only a handful of paid staff, Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland depends on dedicated volunteers to keep the Center open and birds tended to all year long. Volunteers

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Volunteers In Action

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clean cages, work in the clinic, help rehabilitate birds and assist with education.

In addition to the amazing volunteers and donors, the Center keeps going and growing thanks to donors who provide little everyday things that really add up. Some of the supplies that the Center gets delivered at no cost save the Center thousands of dollars every year. These include newspapers to line kennels, medical supplies, bird food, overstock rodents, damaged bags of dog food (for raising rodents), potatoes for meal worms, lead-free surplus venison and fish from overstocked ponds. Volunteers bring in cleaning supplies, maintenance items and anything that they see we might need.

Volunteers provide maintenance and landscaping services, photography and crafts for special events. Numerous tree services provide hundreds of hours each year helping us reunite healthy, fallen baby raptors to nests. Local Eagle Scouts construct exhibits, nesting boxes and other fixtures. The Center could not survive without these volunteers and donors.

Volunteer Spotlight



Susan Schumann Skehan
Photo by RJ Wiley

Susan Schumann Skehan, Volunteer Naturalist and Much More

The Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary in Naples has an army of volunteers who help with education programs, operations, marketing and more. Susan Schumann Skehan is one of those priceless volunteers with a unique talent for identifying birds by their vocalizations. Birding with her along Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary trails over the past 20 years has brought pleasure, knowledge and joy of discovery for thousands of visitors. She is a consummate volunteer who gives her time as a weekly boardwalk naturalist for groups and special birding walks.

Off the boardwalk, she helps in the office and with Corkscrew's special events, using her talents for design and organization. Susan is also a generous financial donor. Naples and Madison, Conn., where she and husband Gary spend their summers, benefit from her boundless volunteer spirit.

Susan was named Audubon of Florida Volunteer of the Year in 2006-07. It is a reflection of the respect, admiration and appreciation she receives from her Corkscrew colleagues.



Lucy Tobias
Photo by Alan Youngblood

Lucy Tobias, Travel Writer, Helped Save Florida's Parks

One night Lucy Tobias received a call from Audubon of Florida Executive Director Eric Draper about an idea he and former Executive Director Clay Henderson had to save 53 state parks from the budget chopping block. Before she knew it, she was visiting parks with hundreds of Audubon Chapter members, neighborhood groups, business leaders and citizen conservationists at park rallies. Lucy then reported her experience on the Audubon website, causing the blog to reach more people than ever before.

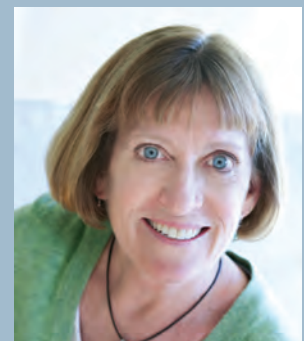
She has covered nine parks at the date of this article, including Fort Mose, Cedar Key State Museum State Park, Devil's Millhopper Geological State Park in Gainesville, Dudley Farm Historic State Park in Newberry, John Gorrie Museum State Park in Apalachicola, Lake Jackson Mounds Archaeological State Park in Tallahassee, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Historic State Park, Cross Creek and Orman House Historic State Park in Apalachicola. The author of *50 Great Walks in Florida* never dreamed she would one day save Florida's parks with park visits of a different kind. Thanks to Lucy, Clay and others, 53 Florida state parks were saved for now.



Marianne Korosy, Florida Important Bird Area (IBA) Program Coordinator

Marianne Korosy is a veteran chapter leader with Clearwater Audubon who is finishing her Ph.D. in wildlife ecology. She previously worked as a seasonal waterbird field biologist for our Florida Coastal Island Sanctuaries (FCIS) program in Tampa. She has coordinated and trained coastal bird stewards on the Gulf Coast, and worked with Pinellas County chapters on a banding study for fallen least tern chicks that are returned to rooftop colonies.

This position is supported by dedicated funding as a result of the Deepwater Horizon Incident. Marianne is finishing up some contract work for Florida Audubon working on shorebird habitat management on beaches in Southwest Florida. She will be part-time in the IBA position until October, at which time she will transition to full-time status. She will be based in the Tampa Bay Region.



Mary Jean Yon, Legislative Consultant

Another addition to the Audubon team is Mary Jean Yon, who is under contract to help us with the Legislative Session this year. Mary Jean comes to us by way of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), where

she spent 30 years working in a variety of environmental programs. As the Director of the Division of Waste Management, and prior to that the Director of DEP's Northwest District, she is a familiar face at the Capitol. She brings to the job good working relationships with the Legislative community, many state agencies and key Water Management District staff. She will focus on water policy, energy and other key issues that arise. A graduate of Florida State University with a M.S. in Land Use Planning, Mary Jean lives in Tallahassee.



Alan Knothe, Northwest Florida Coastal Bird Conservation Coordinator

Alan Knothe is our new Northwest Florida Coastal Bird Conservation Coordinator. This position is funded by a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation in response to the Deepwater Horizon disaster. Alan is particularly suited to recruit, train and deploy volunteers to monitor and manage the Panhandle's shorebirds and seabirds. With a degree in biology, Alan spent many years teaching bird identification courses and leading birding tours in the Panhandle. He worked for the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve developing curricula and teaching their Master Naturalist curriculum, and for the last year has been the Nuisance Wildlife Biologist at the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission in Panama City. Alan will spend much of his time traveling the Panhandle from his home base in Fort Walton Beach.

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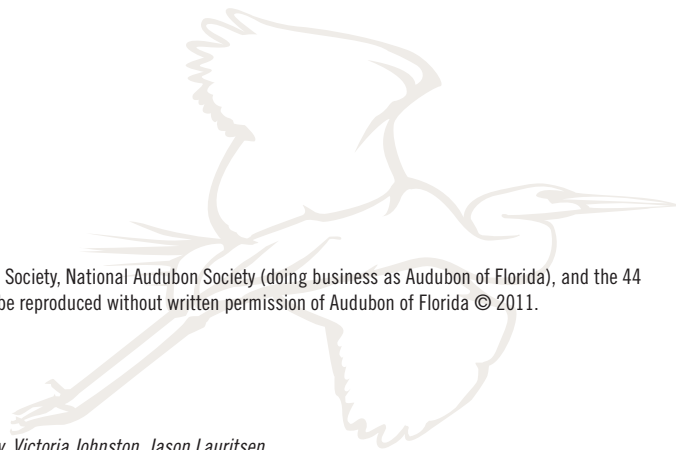
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Audubon's Mission *To conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity.*

Audubon Goes Viral to Save Florida's State Parks

In a response to Governor Rick Scott's call for a 15% reduction to state agency budgets, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection proposed earlier this month to shut down 53 one-of-a-kind state parks and transfer three others out of state control.

Audubon was the first to break this story using our social networking platforms: Audubon's blog, eNewsletters, Facebook Pages and Twitter account. In a matter of hours, the report was being shared throughout the Florida conservation community and beyond, driving media outlets and reporters from around the state to Audubon's networking sites and prompting the media to cover this hot story.

Over the next two weeks, the Florida's Special Places Facebook Page and the Audubon of Florida News blog became the grassroots hub for citizens around the world to speak out against the park closures. Thanks to the hard work of many, Governor Scott spoke up and denounced the park closure plan — a major victory for Audubon and lovers of natural Florida.

Although Audubon spoke up effectively for Florida's State Parks, public lands are still in jeopardy. Budget cuts are coming to Florida. Audubon needs you now more than ever to stay connected to our network and help important issues go viral.

Connect with Audubon Online

Sign up for our eNewsletters: <http://bit.ly/e5LPYX>

Join our Social Networks:

<http://www.AudubonofFloridaNews.org>

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<http://www.facebook.com/FloridasSpecialPlaces>

http://www.twitter.com/FL_Audubon

Devil's Millhopper State Park was one of the 53 parks that were on the state chopping block. Audubon mobilized people to take action. Photo by Lucy Tobias.

