



Audubon | FLORIDA

Naturalist

Winter 2024



College student Alexander DeBear photographed this Florida Scrub-Jay while on an Audubon Florida Assembly field trip to the Lyonia Preserve as part of the Conservation Leadership Initiative program.



Julie Wraithmell, Executive Director

We soared at this year's Audubon Florida Assembly in Daytona Beach, and I thank the members, staff, award winners, and donors who attended the exciting three-day event. You are what hope looks like to a bird!

This year we had the special privilege of looking back at 125 years of Audubon in Florida and setting our sights on future conservation initiatives and wins under the new, strategic Flight Plan. From protecting plume birds at the turn of the 20th century, stopping egregious development projects from the Big Cypress Jetport and the Cross-Florida Barge Canal to creating state parks, national wildlife refuges, and more, Audubon has been there to protect birds and the places they need.

One of my favorite parts of Assembly was a brainstorming activity where we asked participants to think ahead to how we want conservation to look in the Sunshine State. We spoke passionately about working with cities and counties to plant more trees, expanding resilience education and insight amongst coastal communities, creating pocket parks in urban spaces—in the photo below you can see how our ideas took flight to fill an entire wall!

I am grateful this season for all of you, working across all of Florida's counties, habitats, and coastlines, to improve quality of life for both wildlife and people. Cheers to the new year!

Julie Wraithmell, Executive Director,
Audubon Florida



Carol Timmis, Chair

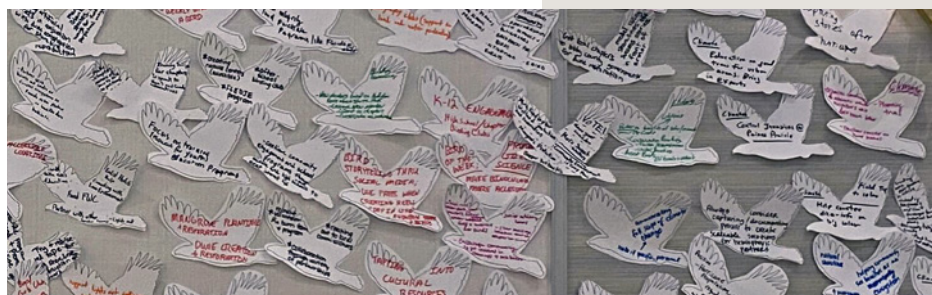
It is with great excitement that I write to you in my first letter as Chair of the Florida Audubon Society Board. As a member of the board for many years, I look forward to this opportunity to play a larger role in Audubon's critical conservation work.

I want to take a moment to thank outgoing Board Chair Heidi McCree and outgoing board members David Cox and Melissa Lammers for their extraordinary service. You fundraised, provided critical policy input, and led by example in your dedication to Florida's special places. In that same vein, I'd also like to welcome John Nelson as the chapter representative for the Indian River Lagoon region—we are thrilled to have you!

The end of the year is a wonderful time to look back and plan for the future. I hope you join me as a bird enthusiast, donor, volunteer, or member so we can flock together to create a more resilient future for both birds and people.

Carol Colman Timmis, Chair,
Audubon Florida

Assembly participants in November brainstormed future conservation ideas for their chapters and beyond. ➔



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The Second Chance shoal in Southwest Florida lost sand and elevation after the two storms. Photo: Megan Hatten/Audubon Florida.



▼ Nesting success varied across Audubon-monitored areas on the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts. From colony failures in Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries to successful rooftop fledges, our team works to learn from every site. Photo: Kara Cook/Audubon Florida



Beach-nesting and Wading Birds, Facing Predation and Hurricanes, Successfully Fledge Chicks

At Audubon, we held our breath this year as a predicted busy hurricane season had the potential to impact not only our coastal communities, but our beach-nesting birds as well. Hurricane Debby skirted Florida's Gulf Coast as a tropical storm, effectively ending the nesting season in Southwest Florida before making landfall as a hurricane in the Big Bend area in August. Helene and Milton had large impacts on neighborhoods, shorelines, and barrier islands in September and October.

SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

This year, we saw more Black Skimmers and Least Terns nesting at Second Chance Critical Wildlife Area and Carlos Pointe Beach. Even though Hurricane Debby caused significant losses of nests and chicks at Second Chance, 600 Black Skimmers fledged 150 chicks. Least Terns fledged 100 chicks from 168 nests—60 more than last year—before the colony overwashed during Debby. At nearby Caxambas Pass Critical Wildlife Area, a successful Black Skimmer colony produced 56 fledged chicks for the first time in nearly seven years. Carlos Pointe Beach supported a colony with 1,333 adult Black Skimmers and 418 adult Least Terns, resulting in 231 Black Skimmer and 200 Least Tern fledglings despite losses caused by storm surge from Tropical Storm Debby. Snowy Plovers, however, experienced reduced nesting success on Fort Myers Beach, with only six fledged chicks across the area. Wilson's Plovers continued to do well, with 11 chicks fledged on Fort Myers Beach and 19 fledged across various Collier County sites.

TAMPA BAY REGION

Great news! Thanks to predation management and partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), the Least Tern colony on South Lido Key produced 140 fledged chicks. Additionally, Fort De Soto Park continues to be a productive nesting site: Staff recorded multiple Wilson's Plover fledges, one Snowy Plover fledge, and three American Oystercatcher fledges from nests at the park. Staff are also seeing a rise in nesting attempts by Snowy Plovers, which speaks to the successful habitat management at the park. Black Skimmer colonies (four in Pinellas and Sarasota counties) produced a total of 665 fledged chicks. These colonies experienced overwash from Tropical Storm Debby in August, ending the season a little earlier than expected.

FLORIDA COASTAL ISLANDS SANCTUARIES

Unfortunately, it was a difficult year for nesting at these islands sites in Tampa Bay—not due to storms, but from both predation and human disturbance. The Alafia Banks Bird Sanctuary, leased from and managed in collaboration with the Mosaic Company and Port Tampa Bay, which hosted 6,000 breeding pairs last year, only saw 500 pairs this year across nine species. Wood Stork colonies across the region were down, and Audubon staff continue to investigate possible causes, but bright spots appeared for other species. While the first colony abandoned Ann and Rich Paul Little Bird Key at the beginning of the season, herons eventually returned for a second round of nesting, including two pairs of Reddish Egrets and more than 20 pairs of Tricolored Herons.

ROOFTOP NESTING

It was another busy rooftop season in the Tampa Bay region, with 22 active rooftops in Pinellas, Pasco, Hillsborough, and Sarasota counties. Staff recorded seven American Oystercatcher pairs with seven fledged chicks, three Black Skimmer colonies, 12 Least Tern colonies, and five Killdeer pairs. To keep the chicks safe, the Audubon team and volunteers installed and maintained 4,000 feet of chick fencing and 150 chick shelters. In exciting news, we partnered with Beth Forsy, PhD, from Eckerd College to band a Black Skimmer chick that fell from a roof—successfully returning the young bird to the colony. This is only the second rooftop Black Skimmer chick ever banded!

PANHANDLE

Across the Florida Panhandle, Audubon staff monitored nests of Caspian, Royal, Sandwich, Least, Gull-billed, and Sooty Terns; as well as Laughing Gulls, Black Skimmers, Brown Pelicans, American Oystercatchers, Wilson's Plovers, and Snowy Plovers. In the eastern Panhandle, American Oystercatchers had a successful season, fledging chicks from three remote islands. At Tyndall Air Force Base, monitored in partnership with the FWC, nine Snowy Plovers and 27 Wilson's Plover chicks successfully left the beach. Farther west, the Navarre Beach colony saw 150 Least Tern chicks and 50 Black Skimmers successfully fledge. Meanwhile, Panhandle

rooftops hosted Least Terns on 10 sites—an important contribution to the population that should not be overlooked. Beach-nesting birds in the Panhandle were mostly unaffected by the hurricanes that caused storm surge and overwash along the peninsular Gulf Coast.

NORTHEAST FLORIDA

Beach-nesting birds at Huguenot Memorial Park had a good season, producing more than 1,000 new Royal Terns, thousands of Laughing Gulls, 100-plus Brown Pelicans and a few dozen Sandwich Terns. Nesting was difficult, however, for colonial birds at Little Talbot Island given the reshaped nesting areas caused by erosion and deposition, but Wilson's Plovers had another good year at the site. Amelia Island was more productive than usual, thanks to some additional sand and great stewarding, with three dozen Least Terns fledging as well as some Wilson's Plovers. At Anastasia State Park, where the beach was somewhat diminished, Least Terns still fledged more than 100 chicks, plus staff recorded 12 successful nests by Black Skimmers and Wilson's Plovers. Julia's Island has continued to erode. As this important spot was unsuccessful this year, Audubon is supporting efforts to restore the island. Fort Matanzas had their largest colony in years, fledging around 50 Least Terns. Summer Haven, a dynamic site that is filling in again with new sand, had at least 40 Least Terns fledge.

SFWMD Ribbon-cutting Ceremony Marks Major Everglades Milestone

In November, the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) held a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the completion of the construction phase of Restoration Strategies. During the event, held at Hendry County's C-139 Flow Equalization Basin, the pump was turned on in celebration!

The 11,000-acre basin will store runoff and improve the ability of Stormwater Treatment Areas 5/6 to remove nutrients and send more clean water into the Everglades.

The multi-faceted Restoration Strategies project is a collaboration between the state and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, composed of 13 projects initially funded in 2013 to improve water quality for eight million Floridians, restore ecological balance, and provide recreation opportunities.

Countless partners attended the event, including the Army Corps of Engineers, the Seminole and Miccosukee Tribes of Indians, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.



Floridians Across the Sunshine State Speak Up for Public Lands and Conservation Deals

Conservation—especially of land already owned by the state—was top of mind this fall as advocates across Florida used their voices on behalf of state parks, Withlacoochee State Forest, and rural ranchlands and wetlands in Orange County.

GOLF COURSES IN STATE PARKS?

Audubon Florida staff continue to monitor public meeting schedules for any indications that the development proposals concerning state parks are returning for public comment or approval.

In August, we sounded the alarm when the Florida Department of Environmental Protection announced that nine state parks were slated to receive hotels, golf courses, pickleball courts, and more. You responded! More than 38,000 of you filled out our action alert and hundreds more shared the news across your networks and called your local elected officials. Amidst this public outcry, Governor DeSantis shelved the plans...for now.

Because of Audubon's strength as a respected conservation leader, we led the charge against these egregious development proposals, inspiring Floridians to stand up for conservation and nature-based recreational uses of state parks. We will continue to help grassroots advocates engage with park planners as this process moves forward and provide expert evaluation of the potential impacts of new proposals. As Florida's oldest statewide conservation organization, Audubon was part of the effort to create Florida's state parks and is just as important to the survival of these special places and their wildlife today.

DEVELOPER EYES STATE FOREST

Audubon Florida learned of a potential development proposal and land swap within the Withlacoochee State Forest for a 324-acre golf course. In return for the high-quality habitat in the state forest—a critical part of the Florida Wildlife Corridor—golf course developer Cabot Citrus would purchase 861 acres of timber land located roughly 50 miles northwest of Cedar Key in Levy County to give to the State of Florida. While the swap would result in additional protected acres, the quality of habitat is not equal, potentially setting a dangerous precedent that views protected lands as “open” for development. Though the Florida Cabinet approved the swap, they



Crested Caracara.
Photo: Tim Timmis/Audubon
Photography Awards

delegated the final decision to the Acquisition and Restoration Council (ARC). “Public outcry and advocacy combined with our policy team’s hard work appear to have this proposal on hold. The terms of the proposed swap set a high bar for the applicants to clear. Audubon’s team is remaining vigilant on this issue despite the lack of movement,” explains Executive Director Julie Wraithmell.

Our policy team is carefully watching future ARC agendas for the appearance of this issue and is ready to advocate for the swap to return to the Cabinet for further discussion and public comment.

MASSIVE ORANGE COUNTY RANCH ANNEXATION AVERTED

The City of Orlando and Orange County came to an agreement on several terms that halted the City’s annexation of 82 square miles of wetlands, flatwoods, scrub, and ranch in eastern Orange County.

Audubon and its members were vocal opponents of this hasty annexation because Orlando’s land use regulations are less stringent than Orange County’s when applied to the development of large rural/natural areas, as is intended for these parcels. The annexation was being advanced in haste because of two Orange County referenda on the November 5 ballot that, now passed, require the City to share annexation approval authority with the County and increase protections for rural areas.

Congratulations to all the Audubon advocates in Orange County who wrote to the Orlando City Council, urging them to deny the annexation request. Congratulations also to our partners at Orange Audubon Society for their advocacy. Thank you to Orange County for standing firm on this issue on behalf of the public interest. And thank you to Mayor Dyer and the members of the Orlando City Council for hearing our concerns and striking an agreement that creates the conditions for more protective comprehensive planning.



For American Flamingos to survive and thrive, they need healthy colonies across their breeding range. Photo: Baoting Chen/Audubon Photography Awards

Flamingos Remain in Florida, but Concerns Grow Across Their Range

In 2023, Florida experienced a pink wave: Hundreds of American Flamingos blew into Florida and across the United States on the winds of Hurricane Idalia. In a February 2024 survey, staff and birders around the Sunshine State counted more than 100 flamingos—giving hope that some of those blown off course in the storm had chosen to remain in Florida. In November, Mark Cook, PhD, of the South Florida Water Management District, spotted a flock of 62 birds strong in Florida Bay.

What does this mean for the future of flamingos in Florida? What does it mean for the population as a whole?

The American Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) is one of six species of flamingo spread out around the globe. With some living year-round in Florida in small numbers, American Flamingos breed in huge colonies in the Caribbean, Mexico, Colombia, and Venezuela. While we celebrate increasing numbers of flamingos in Florida, biologists are sharing concerns about the global population, currently estimated at more than 230,000 birds but facing both a changing climate and increasing disturbance.

“There is a healthy population, for now,” explains Audubon Florida’s State Research Director Jerry Lorenz, PhD. “But that doesn’t make it immune to difficult nesting conditions. We are working more closely with international partners to monitor these breeding colonies should they begin to decline.”

What has the scientists so spooked?

“Unfortunately, while numbers have remained steady, the actual number of functioning colonies has decreased,” says Frank Ridgley, DVM, of Zoo Miami.

Flamingos nest and raise their chicks together in giant colonies to better fend off predators. In recent years, however, some colonies have been damaged by

hurricanes, others swamped by storm surge, and still others face increasing levels of human disturbance.

“The fewer nesting sites, the more vulnerable the population is to disease or a mega storm that impacts all of them,” adds Dr. Lorenz.

What is Audubon doing?

We follow birds to our work—and they aren’t constrained by the arbitrary boundaries of cities, states, and countries. As a result, a critical element of Audubon’s efforts in habitat conservation involves strengthening the ties between the places birds need across the hemisphere. The team at Audubon’s Everglades Science Center continues to work with organizations and international partners within the Florida Flamingo Working Group (like Zoo Miami) as part of a larger effort by the Caribbean Flamingo Conservation Group to monitor and protect the American Flamingo. As nesting sites dwindle in other regions, protecting and restoring habitat here in Florida for a potential return of breeding flamingos could increase the resilience of the population as a whole.

“This is a pivot point,” continues Dr. Lorenz, “We have the opportunity to take conservation actions *before* a population decline, instead of working to bring back a species from the brink.”

New Visitor Experience at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary

After years of planning, the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary team is excited to launch the first phase of a completely new visitor experience inside the Blair Visitor Center and along the boardwalk. Installed in November 2024, the updated suite of navigational and interpretive signs is part of an unprecedented capital campaign that will transform the Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary campus and elevate Audubon's education and conservation impact.

Sanctuary visitors will first notice a new logo and lettering on the front of the building as well as colorful navigational signs and exhibits inside the Center. The new exhibits orient visitors to the Sanctuary's location within the Greater Everglades watershed, identify the species of birds that visitors might see on the feeders, explain the main habitats found along the boardwalk, and summarize the important conservation work underway across the 13,000-acre Sanctuary.

Visitors will also encounter more than 50 eye-catching and educational signs along the 2.25-mile boardwalk, most of which feature photography from the Sanctuary. Thirteen large interpretive signs cover topics including the importance of prescribed fire, the wonders of wetlands, what makes a healthy watershed, and more, while smaller signs cover cultural history and our Landmark Cypress program, species identification, and many other topics. All boardwalk interpretive signs include a QR code that leads to sign content translated to Spanish and Haitian Creole.

Still to come are a revamped Discovery Center exhibit hall and new campus entrance, as well as the final components of the visitor experience refresh, anticipated to be completed in 2025.



▲ New signage refreshes the boardwalk learning experience while sharing exciting discoveries and wildlife sightings with visitors. Photos: Renée Wilson/Audubon Florida

The visitor experience refresh is a critical part of our visionary transformation of the Sanctuary campus and its programs to meet the challenges of the 21st century, including a changing climate and rampant development in Southwest Florida. For the past 70 years, we have repurposed structures to fit the needs of our work to preserve the Sanctuary, but we have reached a turning point. It is now time to make strategic investments in the Sanctuary's infrastructure that will enhance our ability to deliver transformational programming to students and lifelong learners, conduct the science needed to preserve our 13,000 acres and beyond, and inspire every visitor to become a champion for this cherished place.

To learn more about the campaign, visit: corkscrew.audubon.org/elevate



Thank you to our partners in celebrating Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary's 70th anniversary!



THE RITZ-CARLTON
NAPLES, TIBURON



Hurricanes Damage Aviary at Center for Birds of Prey and Affect Eagle Nests Across Florida

Back-to-back hurricanes swept through Florida this fall and, sadly, the Center for Birds of Prey's original Owl Aviary was damaged to the point that it is now uninhabitable. Staff have moved the residents to safe areas behind the scenes, but the planned construction of the new aviary has become more urgent than ever.

A new aviary will mean resident owls (Great Horned Owls Charley and Jeanne and Barred Owls Fil and Hitch) and Black Vulture Uff-da can return home, and guests can see these amazing birds like never before. The Center is halfway to its goal of \$675,000—with your help we can create a new home for our resident raptors!



Can you help us build a new home for these owls?
Visit: cbop.audubon.org/owlaviary



Photo: Steven Sachs/Audubon Photography Awards

HURRICANES AND BALD EAGLES

Hurricanes impacted wild raptors across the state this year as well. EagleWatch volunteers documented 57 nests in 19 counties lost after the one-two punch of Hurricanes Helene and Milton. About half of those affected pairs are rebuilding in the same tree, or a nearby tree or structure if the original tree is no longer standing. As the season goes on—Bald Eagle nesting season ends in mid-May—we anticipate these numbers will grow as volunteers continue to confirm losses and relocations.



Photo: Laura Umfer

⤴ Nesting Bald Eagles are vulnerable to disturbance to their stick nests, which they use year after year. Luckily, after back-to-back hurricanes this year, half of monitored eagles that lost their nests rebuilt.



Conservation Leadership Initiative students and their mentors kicked off the year-long program at Audubon Florida's Assembly in Daytona Beach. Photo: Sydney Walsh/Audubon

Conservation Leadership Initiative Launches New Cohort

Each fall, the Conservation Leadership Initiative (CLI) brings together 25 Florida college students and 25 Audubon chapter mentors to foster future conservation leadership. The program kicks off at the Audubon Assembly, an event that immerses participants in Audubon's mission over the course of three days. The 2024 theme, "125 Years of Audubon in Florida," highlighted the organization's pioneering conservation efforts, starting with work in the Everglades and extending to its modern-day leadership in Florida's environmental initiatives.

Key components of the program included a special meet-and-greet with National Audubon Society's Chief Conservation Officer, Marshall Johnson, offering valuable insights into national conservation efforts. Students also took part in a field trip to the Marine Discovery Center, where they toured the bird and sea turtle hospitals and enjoyed a bird walk at Ponce Inlet Beach.

In addition, CLI students participated in curated learning sessions, including a career panel with Audubon staff and a leadership development session. Afterward, they rejoined the larger Assembly to network with environmental leaders, chapter members, and government officials, further expanding their connections within the conservation community.

This event marked the beginning of the students' year-long CLI experience.

Over the next several months, they will continue to work with their mentors in local Audubon chapters, further immersing themselves in Florida's conservation efforts, building professional skills, and forging lasting connections within the environmental network.

“My experience with the Audubon Florida Assembly was absolutely unforgettable. I learned so much from people across all branches of the organization. The field trips were incredible, from seeing injured sea turtles being rehabilitated to searching for elusive Florida Scrub-Jays. It was an incredibly enriching experience, and I had the chance to talk and connect to everyone—from directors to volunteers—all of whom were eager to share their stories and experiences, making it a truly welcoming environment. Made some really cool friends and met so many inspiring people along the way.”
— Shazad Baig, Broward College



CLI students met with National Audubon Society Chief Conservation Officer Marshall Johnson at Assembly. Photo: Madison Slater

Audubon Florida Recognizes Conservation Leaders for 2024

Audubon Florida recently honored seven conservation leaders as part of our annual Assembly event on November 7-9, 2024 in Daytona Beach.

Audubon Florida would not be able to deliver much-needed conservation results for our state without the generous support of our donors. Each year, we recognize a **Philanthropist of the Year**, celebrating the spirit of generosity that makes this work possible. Audubon is pleased to honor **Steve and Merrilee Nellis** with our distinguished Philanthropist of the Year award. Steve and Merrilee Nellis see the importance of preserving Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and use their hard-earned resources to do that. They have made transformational investments to ensure that the Sanctuary continues to thrive for the benefit of both wildlife and people. In addition to their treasure, Steve dedicates his time. Whether it's through educating visitors along the boardwalk or cleaning up after hurricanes, Steve spends countless hours helping out where needed at the Sanctuary.

The **Guy Bradley Award** recognizes an individual for stewardship in the face of threats to birds and their habitats and a relentless commitment to conserving Florida's wildlife. Audubon selected **Laurie Dolan**, Environmental Specialist II at the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, to receive this year's award for her outstanding dedication to the protection of the Florida Scrub-Jay. Dolan has had a critical impact on the habitat and population of Florida Scrub-Jays at the Marjorie Harris Carr Cross Florida Greenway Triangle near Ocala. At a site that poses management challenges, her ability to adapt and innovate has kept the jays thriving.

The **Everglades Champion Award** is given for bold action on behalf of the Everglades or continuous leadership on behalf of Everglades restoration and the recovery of Lake Okeechobee and its estuaries. Audubon congratulates **Kathy Burchett and her team at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service** for the establishment of the new Everglades to Gulf Conservation Area, a transformative milestone in the ongoing effort to preserve and restore the Everglades.



From left to right: Audubon Chief Conservation Officer Marshall Johnson, Steve Nellis, and Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary Director Keith Laakkonen.



From left to right: Audubon Florida Executive Director Julie Wraithmell and Director of Bird Conservation Audrey DeRose-Wilson with Laurie Dolan.



From left to right: Audubon Florida Everglades Science Coordinator Paul Gray and Director of Everglades Policy Kelly Cox with Kathy Burchett.

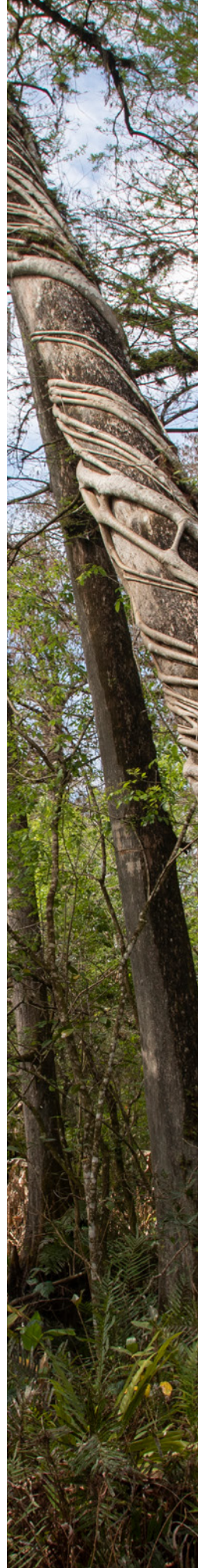




Photo:
Luke Franke/
Audubon

The **Special Places Award** is given to someone who makes an extraordinary effort to protect the places that make Florida special. Audubon chose **Max Chesnes and the team at the Tampa Bay Times** for efforts to sound the alarm about the state park development proposals, including breaking the story, doing deep fact-finding, keeping Floridians up to date on proposal details, and so much more. They equipped Floridians with the information they needed to defend these special places.

The **Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award** is given to an officer who has demonstrated that protecting wildlife is more than a job, but a moral obligation, and has made significant contributions to protecting Florida's wildlife either within or above the course of their regular duty. This year's award went to **Lieutenant Jason Register** in the Franklin County Sheriff's Office. Lt. Register and his team play a pivotal role in protecting sea and shorebirds in Franklin County—especially at critical wildlife areas on busy holiday weekends. He not only protects birds, but he has also proposed new strategies to reach beach visitors with educational messaging before nesting bird disturbance occurs.

The **Volunteer of the Year Award** is given to those who have a history of exhibiting exemplary dedication to birds and the places they need and consistently go above and beyond in their service to conservation. This year's award went to **Lynn and Harry Etters**. Within just the last two years, the Etters have contributed more than 350 hours to support critical land stewardship activities at Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, including prescribed fire, invasive plant treatments, and trail trimming. They also assist with the Sanctuary's popular back-country bike tours.

President Theodore Roosevelt is credited with the founding of America's National Park System and making land conservation a core American value. Every year, Audubon Florida recognizes a conservationist who has made significant contributions to conservation in Florida with the **Teddy Roosevelt Award**. Audubon Florida is pleased to announce that **Senator Gayle Harrell** is the recipient of the 2024 Teddy Roosevelt Award in recognition of her long history of environment leadership, including her sponsorship of Florida's stormwater rule update and her principled stance opposing the development of golf courses in Jonathan Dickinson State Park.

Award photos taken by Renée Wilson/Audubon Florida.



From left to right: Audubon Florida Executive Director Julie Wraithmell and Communications Director Erika Zambello with Max Chesnes.



Lt. Jason Register



From left to right: Audubon Florida Executive Director Julie Wraithmell, Audubon Chief Conservation Officer Marshall Johnson, Lynn Etters, and Harry Etters.



From left to right: Audubon Florida Executive Director Julie Wraithmell and Senior Director of Policy Beth Alvi with Senator Harrell.



Chief Conservation Officer Marshall Johnson stands with winners of Audubon Florida's chapter awards, as well as Chapters Conservation Manager Kristen Kosik and Audubon Florida Executive Director Julie Wraithmell. Photo: Renée Wilson/Audubon Florida

Audubon Florida Presents Awards to Six Inspiring Chapters

At Audubon Assembly, we come together to celebrate our collective, statewide accomplishments while also shining a spotlight on the exceptional work of individual chapters. Each year, chapter presidents are invited to nominate their own chapters—or others—for awards recognizing excellence in education programs, conservation projects, and the honor of Chapter of the Year. Each award is presented to one "small" chapter (under 500 members) and one "large" chapter (over 500 members).

Nominations are thoroughly reviewed by the Audubon Florida Board's Chapters Committee, which is composed of chapter leaders from across the seven regional conservation committees in our state. These leaders understand the time, effort, and dedication required to plan and execute high-quality projects, and this year, they faced a particularly challenging task. Not only did we receive a record number of nominations, but the caliber of the chapters' work was exceptional.

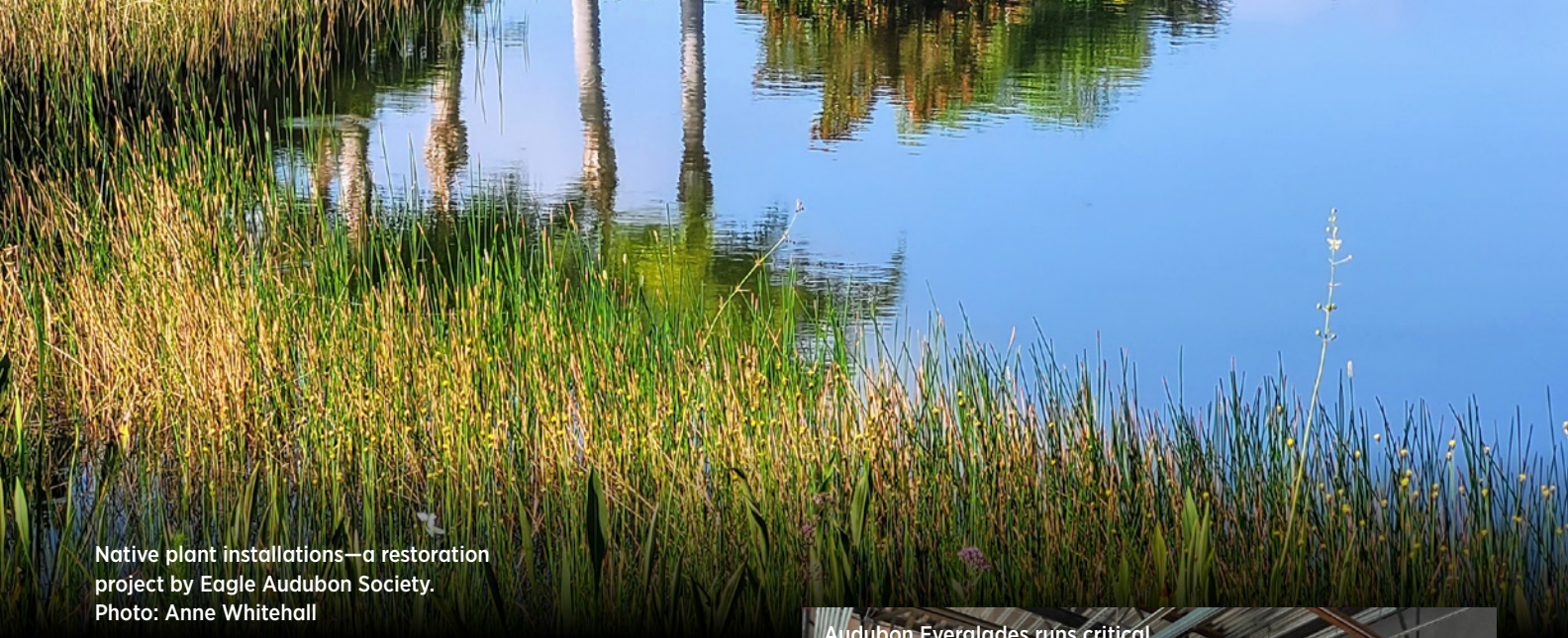
The Best Education Award for a small chapter went to West Volusia Audubon Society for their Audubon Ambassadors program at Stetson University. The Ambassadors program is a campus-to-chapter connection program, providing opportunities for students at Stetson to get involved with Audubon while connecting more students on campus to Audubon's work. Program achievements in the past year include

tabling sessions, festival outreach, birding walks, and organizing ecosystem restoration planting events on Stetson's campus. The Ambassador program has also helped to establish an official Audubon Campus Chapter and has increased the diversity of board members of West Volusia Audubon.

The Best Education Award for a large chapter went to Duval Audubon Society for their Lights Out North Florida Bird Friendly Window Art project. This is a 2-for-1 education and conservation project, solving a problem with Cedar Waxwing window collisions at a local school. Duval Audubon worked with teachers to implement a bird-friendly window art project, allowing students to create window art that meets the requirements of anti-collision guidelines for birds. Not only did the project result in a beautiful facade of bird-friendly window designs, but also the start of a new "Science, Art, and Conservation" program at the school.



◀ Bird-friendly window art created by students in collaboration with Duval Audubon. Photo: Elizabeth Filippelli



Native plant installations—a restoration project by Eagle Audubon Society.
Photo: Anne Whitehall

The Best Conservation Award for a small chapter was presented to Eagle Audubon Society for their native plant installations around a stormwater pond in their neighborhood. By replacing torpedo grass with native plants, they restored wildlife habitat and created a natural filtration system to improve water quality before it flows into Cypress Creek, Little Manatee River, and Tampa Bay. The project also serves as an educational tool for residents, highlighting the importance of water quality.

The Best Conservation Award for a large chapter went to Alachua Audubon Society for their American Kestrel nest box monitoring program, maintaining 35 nest boxes in Alachua County to support the threatened Southeastern American Kestrel. In partnership with Avian Research and Conservation Institute, the program tracks tagged and banded fledgling kestrels to study their survival and habitat needs. The project has successfully fledged 45 kestrels and engaged volunteers and students in conservation efforts.

Bay County Audubon Society was selected as the Small Chapter of the Year for its outstanding contributions to conservation and community outreach. Their flagship event, *Nature Connection*, grew to attract more than 2,000 attendees, inspiring a love of nature across the community. They have also demonstrated a strong commitment to stewardship through their dedicated care of Laidlaw Preserve. These accomplishments reflect their dedication to preserving natural spaces and fostering environmental awareness.



Audubon Everglades runs critical conservation programs for interested community members.
Photo: Shelly Rozenberg

Audubon Everglades was selected as the Large Chapter of the Year. Audubon Everglades has experienced immense growth over the past year, as they worked on their transformation from a focus primarily on birding outings into a dynamic conservation organization. They have diversified their programs, expanding their reach through innovative initiatives like virtual events, inclusive birding workshops, and habitat restoration projects. Committed to advancing conservation and advocacy, the chapter has fostered environmental stewardship and inspired greater awareness and participation in protecting ecosystems.

A heartfelt thank you to all those who submitted nominations, and a huge congratulations to this year's Chapter Awards recipients!

Thank You to Audubon's \$10K+ Supporters of the Florida Program

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McBurney and Family
Close Friend Foundation
Vincent J. Coates Foundation
Collier Community Foundation
The Estate of Robert Brian Cummings
CustomInk, LLC
Deering Foundation
John A. Joan M. Dietze Charitable Trust
Margaret and Edward Dudnyk
Duke Energy Foundation
Cindy and Elliott Erickson
The Everglades Foundation, Inc.
Mr. Wayne L. Feakes
Felburn Foundation
Paul and Victoria Ferber
John Ficken
Fischer Family Philanthropic Fund
Florida Power & Light Company
The Joe and Sarah Galloway Foundation
Robert E. Gallagher Charitable Trust
Gideon's Bakehouse Inc.
Ron Ginsburg
Allyn L. Golub, PhD
The Art and Phyllis Grindle Foundation, Inc.
The Estate of Ann Harwood-Nuss, M.D.
Drs. Nan and Scott Hayworth
Donald Herndon
The Green Heron Fund
Liz Hines
Steve and Marsee Israel

Jacarlene Foundation
Richard and Lynette Jaffe
The John F. and Virginia K. Johnson Family
Fund
Lois and Bill Kelley
The KHR McNeely Family Fund
Knopf Family Foundation
Jud Laird
Mark and Barb Langenhan
Anthony and Judith Licata
Frank Liedtky
Rose Polansky Lishner Trust
David Lockton
Paula and Paul Loftus
Tyler and Harriette Lowrey
Lykes Bros. Inc.
Falcon's Treehouse - Marty and Cecil
Magpuri
Mary Ann Mahoney
Gerald and Darryl Manning
Massey Services, Inc.
Chauncey and Marion D. McCormick Family
Foundation
H. Bruce McEver
Middletown Medical PC
Miami Foundation - Give Miami Day
William and Barbara Millar
Heidi and Brian Miller
Dixie Mills Household
Mark Mitchell
Mitigation Marketing LLC
Art Mollenhauer
Gale and Philip Morgan
The Mosaic Company Foundation
Giselle Wagner and Paul Myerson
Steve and Merrilee Nellis
NextEra Energy Foundation, Inc.
Ocean Reef Conservation Association, Inc.
OUC - The Reliable One
Paul Pacter
John and Rachel Paz
The Perkins Charitable Foundation
Carol B. Phelon Foundation
Pinellas County Community Foundation
Gloria M. and W. Douglas Pitts
W. Douglas and Faith Pitts
Publix Super Markets, Inc.
The Rathmann Family Foundation

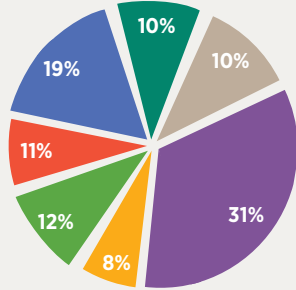
Chris and Mary Rayburn Family
Rayonier
Mr. and Mrs. John N. Rigsby
River Branch Foundation
Robertson Foundation
Dr. Michael W. Rohovsky
Karen Rohovsky Memorial/Johnson &
Johnson
William J. and Tina Rosenberg Foundation
The Sauerland Foundation
Kathy Sayre and John Corbitt
Robert F. Schumann Foundation
Seaworld & Busch Gardens Conservation
Fund
Michael and Judy Sheridan
Linda Sitek and Mike Smith
The Spurlino Foundation
Richard and Sharon Stilwell
Stephen Strunk in memory of Phyllis Strunk
Sidney A. Swensrud Foundation
Elaine Berol Taylor & Scott Bevan Taylor
Foundation
Anne D. Thomas
Carol Timmis
Tisbest Philanthropy in honor of Giselle
Wagner
Walt Disney World Resort
Mary Sue and William Weinaug
Wells Fargo Foundation
West Volusia Audubon Society
Wildlife Foundation of Florida
Jenny Williams-Cohen
John and Mary Lou Winn
Winter Park Veterinary Hospital
Lynn and Louis Wolfson II Family Foundation
Denise Wynn



AUDUBON FLORIDA & FLORIDA AUDUBON SOCIETY FINANCIALS JULY 1, 2023 – JUNE 30, 2024

AUDUBON FLORIDA EXPENSES BY PROGRAM

**TOTAL
EXPENSE**
\$10,162,049



\$1,015,418 Florida Operations Program

\$1,059,635 Public Policy

\$3,157,424 Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary

\$765,649 Everglades Conservation

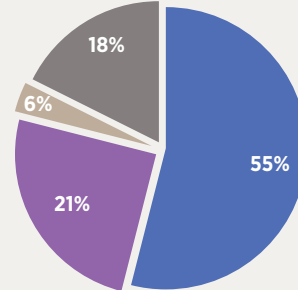
\$1,171,420 Everglades Science

\$1,085,843 Center for Birds of Prey

\$1,906,660 Coastal Stewardship

AUDUBON FLORIDA REVENUE SOURCES

**TOTAL
REVENUE**
\$10,162,049



\$5,555,882 Contributions & Bequests

\$2,132,018 Government Grants

\$650,764 Investments

\$1,823,385 Center Admissions & Other Revenue

FLORIDA AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC. STATEMENT OF ASSETS, LIABILITIES, & NET ASSETS AS OF JUNE 30, 2024

ASSETS

Current Assets

Cash	\$44,000
Cash - <i>Restricted</i>	\$19,615
Charles Schwab Investment	\$6,246,968
Charles Schwab Investment - <i>Restricted Geanagel</i>	\$1,392,571
Charles Schwab Investment - <i>Restricted VonBoroski</i>	\$428,290

Total Current Assets \$8,131,444

Other Assets

Land	\$3,168,856
Building & Improvements	\$2,302,464
Furniture & Equipment	\$35,063
Accumulated Depreciation	-\$1,542,230

Total Other Assets \$3,964,153

TOTAL ASSETS \$12,095,597

LIABILITIES & EQUITY

Liabilities \$6,755

Net Assets

Land-Preservation	\$503,612
Board Designated Acquisition Fund	\$6,246,968
Unrestricted Net Assets	\$2,383,307
Temporarily Restricted Net Assets	\$1,520,861
Permanent Restricted Net Assets	\$300,000
Net Income	\$1,140,849

Total Net Assets \$12,095,597




TOTAL LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS
\$12,095,597

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