



WINTER 2005-06

Florida Naturalist

Preserving
COASTAL WETLANDS

2006 Conservation Agenda

RECOGNIZING
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The recent hurricanes that caused such loss of life and property along the Gulf Coast remind us of the storms that severely damaged Florida last year. Like so many in Florida, I was inconvenienced by early, weaker versions of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, but losing power for a few days and throwing away spoiled food was nothing compared to what our neighbors endured.

New Orleans was my home for many years. I was heartbroken by the impact on the city, yet relieved to learn that relatives and friends were safe.

I hope our Florida coast will be spared further hurricane damage this year; but that hope, frighteningly, may very well be in vain. And even if spared this year, we all know that storms will come next year and for years to come.

Amid discussions of government relief efforts and promises to rebuild, and in view of Governor Jeb Bush's appointment of a special coastal study commission, I worry that some essential messages will be lost and some key questions ignored.

Can anyone really design a way to armor the Gulf's coastal areas enough to withstand hurricane-force winds and destructive storm surges? How much money are we willing to spend and how much are we willing to alter the natural coastal environment to create zones safe for human development?

Coastal habitat is, by its nature, shaped by climate and climatic events. Beaches, barrier islands, and even marshes like the ones eroding and subsiding in south Louisiana, are created mainly from sediments carried from inland areas by storm water runoff. Only recently have humans undertaken efforts to control nature's events with levees, seawalls and other structures, despite abundant evidence that these structures rarely survive nature's repeated assaults.

Not surprisingly, nature itself designs the best coastal defenses. Barrier islands, if left to shift with tides and winds, are the best protection mainland areas have against storm surges and high winds. Marshes absorb additional impact and excess water from those forces.

But when people alter the coast's natural defenses, enormous loss of life and property often results. Aside from its terrible emotional impact, this translates into financial costs for us all. Even residents of inland areas far removed from coastal hazards help shoulder the financial burden of rescuing the coastal inhabitants, help pay the high price of cleanup, and help pay to repair infrastructure and enhance flood control projects - activities which are often environmentally destructive and, in the end, offer uncertain benefit in the face of future storms.

Would it not be wiser to require greater financial responsibility of those who insist on locating in coastal high-hazard areas? Currently, government makes possible much of the very loss just experienced in many places along the Gulf. Federally subsidized flood insurance encourages people to build in places that are certain to fall in the path of a major hurricane sooner or later.

In spite of Clean Water Act policies intended to protect coastal wetlands from development, landowners routinely are granted permits to build in places that are all but certain to flood. In fact, filling wetlands encourages floods by eliminating natural water retention capacity.

The use of seawalls and levees creates a mistaken impression that people and their property are safe from floodwaters. Yet those structures almost always occupy and enclose the very places that water should go during storm events. Seawalls keep waves and winds from rebuilding dunes. Levees rob floodplains of the nourishing deposits of sand and silt that help build landforms.

For birds, Audubon's signature class of living things, attempts by humans to remold coastal areas into expensive real estate are even more costly. Populations of many species of coastal birds are in sharp decline.

It is in the best interests of people - and our birds - to ask tough questions about future public investments on the coasts. Rebuilding the city of New Orleans and providing protection against future storms seems certain to happen. However, bigger levees must go hand in hand with a plan to restore the coastal wetlands and marshes that once served as a natural flood control system by reducing storm surges and absorbing wind and wave energy. More than one million acres of these coastal wetlands - or 1,900 square miles - have been lost since 1930. Reversing the land loss and restoring these important wetlands is absolutely fundamental to any plan to help secure Louisiana from future storms.

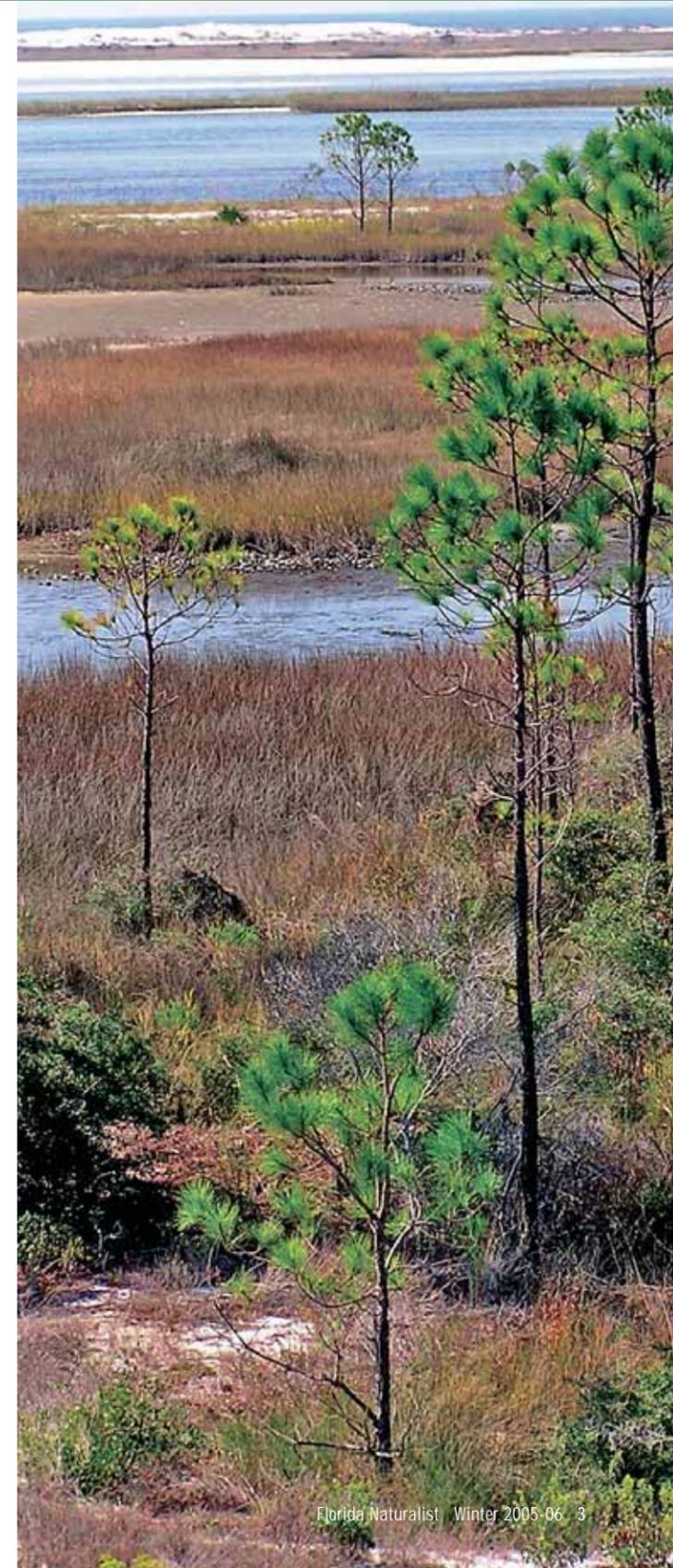
The agenda of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which has been in charge of flood control and wetlands destruction, should change. The corps, also in charge of Everglades' restoration, should direct more resources to restoring natural systems and less on struggling against nature. It is time to encourage projects that protect, enhance and restore rivers, coasts and flood plains instead of doing the opposite with levees, locks and dams.

Audubon of Florida's strategic plan includes workable strategies to protect coastal habitat. These include growth management, rules against developing marshes and other wetlands, and an end to government subsidies for unsustainable coastal development.

You can help defend Florida's coasts. Let public officials know that the best security against storms is to maintain nature's defenses. Stay involved with your local Audubon Society (found in 42 communities throughout Florida - go to audubonofflorida.org). Join our free Florida Conservation Network for an easy way to stay informed and participate in important policy decisions. We can make a difference. We can influence decisions for a better environment.



David E. Anderson, Executive Director, Audubon of Florida





Working Together *We Can Preserve Shorebird Habitat*

Photo of gull-billed terns by Wayne Lasch

Duval Audubon has been heavily involved in preserving habitat in one special coastal area in Northeast Florida: the Bird Islands, located in Nassau Sound between Nassau and Duval Counties. This area is important for threatened and endangered birds including piping plovers, least terns, black skimmers and American oystercatchers. It is also one of the few remaining nesting sites for the gull-billed tern, which numbers fewer than 50 pairs in Florida.

For the past four years, the Duval chapter's efforts have focused on helping the Florida Department of Environmental Protection develop a shorebird management plan that the DEP and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (the state agencies responsible for the Bird Islands) will use to protect key habitat. Chapter work has included reviewing and commenting on draft versions to make sure that the DEP's final plan provides meaningful protection for this habitat. To create a successful plan, chapter members have urged the DEP create a plan that:

- is prepared by staff within state and federal agencies as well as outside conservation groups with relevant expertise.
- covers a sufficiently broad geographic area.
- assigns resources needed to implement and enforce the plan.
- includes an effective education program for the area's users.
- includes a program for collecting information that agencies need to better understand and manage this habitat.
- includes ways to recognize and respond to declines in habitat conditions.

The latest draft plan, completed in July, still has a long way to go to address the points listed above. Because this is plan could be used as the basis for how shorebird habitat is managed by agencies across the state, Audubon of Florida supports this effort and has begun to work jointly with the DEP, the FWCC, and the Duval chapter to make sure that the final plan is effective and acceptable.

While working on this plan, chapter members learned that:

- While we have some information on what comprises a successful coastal habitat, more is needed so we can do a better job of managing remaining habitat, restoring/creating new habitat, and encouraging species to use areas where they have the greatest chances of survival.
- To have the greatest impact on the state agencies that manage these resources, efforts for habitat protection should be coordinated by Audubon of Florida across the state.
- State agencies must be prompted to address shore-bird protection in all coastal projects, especially in habitat areas critical to threatened species.

Can we successfully protect these habitats? "While I admit things seem dire at times", said Carole Adams, long-time activist with Duval Audubon, "at other times I think we can do it. Remember, it wasn't too long ago that people were unaware of the importance of beaches for endangered sea turtles. Now there are relatively good programs for protecting these habitats, and they are beginning to show success. Hopefully, we can work together to do the same for shorebirds."

To learn more about shorebird management plans, email Wayne Lasch wlasch@pbsj.com of Duval Audubon, who prepared this report.



Northeast Florida's Tidal Marshes, Teeming with Life, Warrant Protection

Photo courtesy of Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection

Tidal marshes only get attention from people on their way to somewhere else. Impassable to all boats but those with the shallowest draughts, they're lovely panoramas glimpsed from bridges by beach-bound motorists. It's no wonder our marshes slip away – to erosion, to rising sea levels, to pollution from neighboring uplands – with little notice from the 60-mph audience high above.

Audubon advocates for places like these, and one of its most meaningful tools is the Important Bird Area (IBA) program. IBAs are chosen for their critical importance to bird populations, drawing attention to places like the tidal marshes of northeast Florida between Jacksonville and the Georgia state line.

This labyrinth of channels and Spartina grass lacks the mangroves found further south, and seem

to function like lungs inhaling and expelling the tides. This regular, renewing tidal action transports the necessities of life to fish and invertebrate nurseries nestled in the marsh's shallow creeks. Declining, intricately-marked diamondback terrapins rely on this marsh; in fact, Florida's coast-line comprises more than a third of this diminutive turtle's total range.

This marsh is also the sole Florida home of two subspecies of birds: the Worthington's marsh wren and Macgillivray's seaside sparrow. To the uninitiated, these are merely small, dark birds hell bent on living in one of our harshest habitats. To Audubon, however, they represent a special, vanishing place that Florida would be the poorer for losing.

The marsh, best explored by kayak, exhales a rich organic odor and millions of fiddler crabs

scatter through the grass, sounding like hard rain on the water. Marsh wrens loose their song like a mechanical rendition of a babbling brook. Seaside sparrows teeter on the highest piece of grass, singing with their entire tiny bodies at an impossibly high sky.

As go the marshes, so go its inhabitants. Despite partial preservation under federal and state management, the bulk of these marshes remain in private hands. For now, they are difficult to develop, but as developable uplands dwindle, who knows what may become possible? Audubon of Florida, with your continued support, bears witness to these special places and the wondrous creatures they protect.

– Julie Wraithmell



what are Wetlands?

Photo of snowy egret by Mitchell McConnell

"Simply defined, wetlands are the link between land and water," said David Rockland, Wetlands Habitat Specialist, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. "FWCC considers them to be transitional lands between terrestrial and aquatic systems, where the water table is usually at or near the surface," Rockland continued. Wetlands are classified into marshes (tidal and non-tidal), swamps, bogs and fens. Audubon's focus in this issue is on the critical roles wetlands play in Florida's ecosystem.

Wetlands are important as buffers to absorb and reduce the effects of flooding. "When we take a wetland out of production and drain it, we lose out on that water-holding capacity," Rockland said. "Fill a bathtub with two inches of water and put in one brick. Build a house on that one brick and things are OK. But when subdivisions go in one after another, you have displaced all that water. It has no place to go." Mangroves also control flooding by absorbing a the energy of wind and waves, often stopping them short of high land.

Wetlands work like sponges to remove pollutants from natural systems. "Nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorous, and oil residues, are broken down and absorbed," Rockland said. "Wetlands keep streams and lakes clean, reducing the costs of treating drinking water. This is a benefit we can't even measure – until the wetlands are gone."

Wetlands are habitats for wildlife and fish, for waterfowl, wading birds, shorebirds. They are important to the commercial fishing industry, and to economies that depend on recreation and tourism. Audubon of Florida is committed to protecting and preserving the state's precious wetlands, with your support.

The 2005 Audubon Assembly

a casualty of Hurricane Wilma, will be rescheduled for Fall 2006.

The annual member's meeting will be held during the Audubon Academy in March 2006 (members will receive official notification). During their quarterly meetings, members of AOF's Regional Conservation Committees are taking up the work customarily accomplished at the Assembly.

The Guy Bradley Award

Awarded for outstanding or long-standing courage in the environmental battles that fill the history of Florida.

Audubon of Florida is saddened to note that Rich Paul passed away on November 11, 2005. Rich was designated as the recipient of the 2005 Guy Bradley Award. His career spanned three decades of defending birds and other wildlife, and cultivating and educating the community which has come to learn, under his guiding hand, the joy of supporting the environment. Sharing a birthday with John James Audubon himself, Rich created an environmental legacy of his own of which Audubon is duly proud. He will be missed by all.



Bradley Award Recipient Rich Paul

CHAPTERS Recognized for 2004-05 Achievements

Chapter of the Year and Best Chapter Membership Recruitment Award - Bay County Audubon Society hit a double! Building on the strong conservation focus that won them the Chapter Conservation Award in 2004, BCAS has continued to engage the community. Using high tech presentations, a student writing contest, a journalism contest, participation in the roof nesting tern project and strong educational programs, the chapter expanded its membership by 25 percent in a single year. The members' energy and dedication were felt from local school rooms to the Regional Conservation Committee and on Audubon of Florida's board.

Best Chapter Education Program Award - Francis M. Weston Audubon Society made a huge commitment to environmental education in Escambia County when state funding for the Roy Hyatt Environmental Center was all but eliminated. Chapter members turned their fundraising efforts into an educational exercise in which urban children learned about birds and even held a school-based Birdathon. The Chapter's Birdathon revenues pay for a staff naturalist at the Hyatt Center, a step toward a long-term goal of establishing a Regional Audubon Center there to serve the Panhandle.

Best Chapter Conservation Project Award - Orange Audubon Society's members set about informing voters prior to two important referenda that would affect land and water conservation in Lake County. As a result of their efforts, 72 percent of Lake County voters supported a county land acquisition ballot referendum. This was a resounding endorsement for local conservation. In the small town of Groveland, 72 percent of voters chose to amend the city's charter to limit building densities in the neighboring Green Swamp, a state Area of Critical Concern.

In Harmony with Nature: Restoring habitat one yard at a time

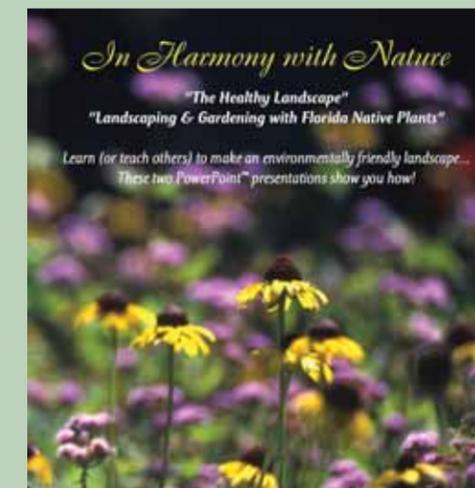
New CD shows how to make a difference, starting with your own home.

The St. Petersburg Audubon Society, in partnership with the Pinellas chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society, has released *In Harmony with Nature*, a compact disc featuring presentations to help homeowners create landscaping that conserves natural resources and nurtures wildlife. Informative photos accompany the narrated presentations. "The Healthy Landscape" covers, among other topics, ways to reduce chemical fertilizers and pesticides in run-off (Florida's number one water-pollution source) and how to conserve water while landscaping for birds, butterflies and other wildlife. "Landscaping and Gardening with Florida Native Plants" supplies details about historical habitats and their relevance to landscaping. Before-and-after photos of commercial and residential sites transformed by native plants are instructive and inspiring.

The CD package includes unnarrated versions with speaker notes so the presentations can be used for outreach. Since 2001, these programs have been presented to thousands of people at garden clubs, neighborhood associations, county extension seminars, native plant chapters, and other Audubon chapters.

"The Healthy Landscape" was part of a project that received funding from the Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP). "Landscaping and Gardening with Florida Native Plants" was produced with grants from the TBEP and the Pinellas County Environmental Foundation (PCEF).

The chapter sells the CD for \$20. Sales tax is included; add \$3 shipping/handling. Quantity discounts and dealer inquiries are invited. To order, or to get more information, contact Bill Bilodeau at 727-322-9695 or email billbilodeau@earthlink.net.



Audubon's Action List

As Audubon enters its second century of conservation, it challenges all Americans to take action to protect birds and the environment. Landscaping tips found in the CD *In Harmony with Nature* provide sound guidance, and here are more things you can do.

GET OUTSIDE

Spend at least two hours a week doing something out in nature - take a walk, ride a bike, work in the garden - and notice the birds and other wildlife that you see and hear. Visit an Audubon Center or join your local Audubon Chapter - and take the kids with you!

How will this help?

We protect what we value. And we value what we use. By making "outside breaks" a regular

part of your life, you will have a chance to relax, enjoy, and appreciate the natural world. This is especially important for children, if we're to inspire them to become the future stewards of our environment.

DINE WITH THE ENVIRONMENT IN MIND

Get to know where the food on your plate comes from. What each of us eats has a powerful impact on our environment. Audubon At Home at www.audubon.org provides tips and resources to help you make your menu green.

How will this help?

What goes on your plate can either help or hurt the environment. For example, by drinking shade-grown coffee, you help protect the wintering habitat for many migratory birds that travel north to the United States to breed. By buying



Photo of piping plover by Neil J. Lamb

organic produce and choosing sustainable seafood, you contribute to the health and well-being of your family, as well as to that of ecosystems.

Links

Audubon magazine conservation cuisine: http://magazine.audubon.org/features0405/chefs_web.html

Audubon At Home shade-grown coffee: http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/coffee/

Audubon's Seafood Lover's guide: <http://seafood.audubon.org/>

2005 Award for Distinguished Foundation Support

The Martin Foundation

In May 2005 The Martin Foundation awarded Audubon of Florida a three-year grant to support the new position of Resource Manager at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. This gift frees existing staff to be more effectively deployed to concentrate on Audubon's environmental policy program in Southwest Florida.

Mrs. Geraldine Martin serves as president of The Martin Foundation. Founded in the mid-1950s by Geraldine's late husband Lee, and his parents Ross and Esther Martin, the foundation's priorities have evolved over the years, although education was always a major interest. As the foundation grew, trustees saw opportunities to become involved in more areas. The foundation has had an interest in environmental issues and conservation for at least 20 years, according to Mrs. Martin.

The Martin family has enjoyed visiting Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary for many years and have come at least once a year when they vacationed here. Mrs. Martin, who now calls Naples home, says Corkscrew is one of the many joys of being in the Naples area. The foundation is very pleased to support Audubon to repay in small part the enjoyment they have derived at Corkscrew. She says the foundation made this significant grant because the work Audubon of Florida does is so vital. It is a joy to her that there is something the foundation can do to help protect these natural areas. "Environmental organizations need all the help they can get these days," Mrs. Martin insists.

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary

NAMED GATEWAY SITE in South Florida Birding Trail

Audubon Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary was the site of a September groundbreaking ceremony put on by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to focus attention on the South Florida section of the Great Florida Birding Trail (GFTB).

The GFTB is a 2,000-mile highway trail designed to conserve and enhance Florida's bird habitat by promoting birdwatching activities and conservation education. The program also promotes economic development in rural areas through birdwatching and other eco-tourism activities.

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary was selected as a "gateway" site because of its abundant bird populations and extensive services for visitors, including the 2.25-mile boardwalk, broad range of educational programs, and the Blair Audubon Center, from which AOF works to effect the acquisition of conservation lands throughout Southwest Florida.

Free guides to the newly-opened South Florida Section, and to all existing sections, will be available on January 14, 2006, at the Great Florida Birding Trail Expo at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. Preliminary plans include workshops,

guided boardwalk tours, food, entertainment and guest speakers. For more information call 239-348-9151, ext. 113.

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary is located at 375 Sanctuary Road, Naples, FL 34120. Visit Corkscrew at www.corkscrew.audubon.org. The Sanctuary is open daily, 7 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. October 1 - April 10, and 7 a.m. - 7:30 p.m. April 11 - September 30.

Help Us Support Nature

In light of the recovery of so many hurricane damaged communities across Florida, my hope is that the needs of the environment will not be forgotten as people put their lives and communities back together.

Nature always has a way of balancing itself, but we in the environmental movement must be there to support her. I have indicated elsewhere in this issue just how important attention to coastal habitats is for humans as well as birds. But we need your help to keep the Audubon voice strong on behalf of Florida's coasts.

Won't you keep Audubon among your charitable priorities as the season of giving and blessings approaches? And make a generous gift to Audubon of Florida! We must keep our vigilance strong, particularly in these times of turmoil, so that Nature's needs have a hearing.

Thank you.
David E. Anderson, Executive Director

Please visit www.audubonofflorida.org to make a donation online, or mail your generous contribution to Audubon of Florida, 444 Brickell Avenue, Suite 850, Miami FL 33131



Thank you

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 2005. The following list recognizes donors from July 1, 2004 through June 30, 2005.

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Ginn Company
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Mrs. Roy Larsen

\$50,000 to \$99,999

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We apologize for any omissions or errors on this list. Please contact the Development Department at 305-371-6399 to confirm corrections or additions. Thank You.

Leigh H. Perkins Recognized for Conservation Leadership

Audubon of Florida's Distinguished Philanthropy Award for 2005 was awarded to businessman and conservationist Leigh H. Perkins. A lifelong fly fisher and bird hunter, Perkins bought his first Orvis fly rod in 1948 while he was a student at nearby Williams College. The successful Cleveland businessman bought the Orvis Company in 1965, when its annual sales were approximately \$500,000. The purchase satisfied a wish to combine business with his favorite hobbies, and under his leadership as chairman, Orvis' sales have grown to more than \$240 million. Today it is one of the nation's most-respected, best-trusted mail order firms.

Perkins has long been recognized internationally as a sportsman, as well as a leader in the direct mail industry. Fortunately for Audubon and many other environmental charities, Perkins is a passionate – and active – conservationist. Through his tireless efforts and generous personal and corporate gifts, he has made Orvis truly one of the country's corporate leaders in habitat preservation and fish and wildlife conservation. His corporate, foundation and personal gifts to Audubon of Florida have been dedicated to one of his favorite ecosystems and one he knows intimately – the Florida Everglades.

Audubon of Florida is grateful to Leigh Perkins for his leadership gifts, and particularly for his support of Audubon's important role in launching the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan



Leigh Perkins, 2005 Recipient of Distinguished Philanthropy Award

YOUR BENEFICIARIES

There are more of them than you realize!

At Audubon, we have always understood the vital connection between people and nature.

By including a bequest to Audubon in your will, you can help ensure a brighter future for both.

Make your bequest by asking your lawyer to use the following language in your will:

I bequeath to the National Audubon Society, Inc., a not-for-profit organization located at 700 Broadway, New York, NY 10003, ____% of my residuary estate for programs in the state of Florida.



To learn more, call for a free brochure. Wayne Mones, Vice President, Planned giving, National Audubon Society, 700 Broadway, New York, NY 10003, 212-979-3033. www.plannedgifts@audubon.org



Photo of black-necked stilt by Christina Evans



Photo by R. J. Wiley

Hurricane Wilma prevented Audubon of Florida volunteer leaders from convening to discuss and ratify the 2006 conservation agenda. However, the agenda is on track to be implemented through the work of chapters, members, staff and allies.

Four Major Statewide Strategies

Protect and Manage Public Lands

Land conservation is losing the race with development. Parts of key ecosystems are being converted to urban areas. Public land management budgets are not keeping pace with the challenges of using prescribed fire, controlling invasive exotics species and managing human use. Audubon is working with allies to accelerate acquisition programs and increase funding for public land management. Goals:

1. Florida Forever - Double funds spent buying conservation lands to \$200 million in 2006 and 2007, and launch a new acquisition program in 2008 to spend \$300 million a year.
2. Complete land acquisition for Everglades Restoration and Lake Okeechobee Recovery by 2010.
3. Initiate new local and regional public land initiatives and require privately funded conservation areas to offset development impacts.

Growth and Transportation

Florida's growth management and transportation policies are failing to deal with the state's rapid population growth. New development, often following new roads, is chewing up Florida's rural and areas. State policies must focus on filling in urban areas and increasing public participation in regional planning. Goals:

1. Increase grassroots participation in regional and local plans in order to designate habitat protection areas and require specific conservation lands and mitigation to offset new development.
2. Focus state growth management oversight on ecosystems and natural areas.
3. Divert highway projects that threaten intact ecosystems and natural areas.

Wildlife and Protected Species

Many species are at risk from the effects of human alteration of habitat. Maintaining abundant resident and migratory wildlife populations requires increased understanding of wildlife needs and intervention for recovery. Goals:

1. Amend and strengthen Florida's protected species rules to increase emphasis on designation and protection of species and critical habitat.
2. Support specific initiatives to assist target populations of birds.
3. Align with national campaigns to defend the Endangered Species Act.

Audubon of Florida's Conservation Agenda for 2006

Focus is on state policy strategies and regional conservation goals.

Water for the Environment

Water is a public resource that should be clean and safe, and managed for the benefit of natural systems. Florida's aquatic and estuarine systems have been heavily damaged by drainage, pollution, overuse and mismanagement. Alteration of natural and seasonal recharge of groundwater and flows of surface water must be balanced with environmental needs. Goals:

1. Revise state policies to give natural systems legal allocations of water to assure their long-term health before water is permitted for other uses.
2. Water management districts must set uncompromising schedules for reserving water for natural systems and establishing Minimum Flows and Levels (MFLs).
3. Maintain, improve and restore natural storage capacity in order to reduce withdrawals and diversions from natural systems.
4. Expand, accelerate and improve floodplain and water recharge area acquisition and management to prevent these areas from being developed, while restoring natural areas and ecosystems.
5. Reduce pollution and clean up polluted waterways.
6. Protect Florida's springs and the spring-sheds that are their sources.
7. Work for stronger federal, state and local wetlands protection policies.

Regional Approach to Conservation

Audubon of Florida's strategic plan proposes strengthening programs in six regions of the state. The regional programs will deploy chapter and volunteer leadership and staff to create public and political support for ecosystem-based conservation strategies.

Everglades

Audubon will continue its leadership policy and science role in Everglades Restoration and Lake Okeechobee Recovery. Audubon's focus is getting government to deliver on its commitments to store, clean and flow billions of gallons of water, now wasted to tide, back into the natural system. This requires billions of dollars to buy land and build projects. Restoration also requires that water be used primarily for the environment instead of water supply to promote growth. Audubon's major challenges are development pressure on restoration lands and a fall-off of federal commitment to restoration.

Big Cypress Region

The Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, with its old-growth cypress forest, is the heart of Audubon's southwest regional program. The region's complex ecosystems provide habitat for keynote species such as Florida panthers and wood storks that suffer increasing pressure from development and population growth. Audubon is working with allies to protect land, offset development impacts, and restore the freshwater flows in key areas from north of the alosa-hatchee River to the Ten Thousand Islands.

Central Florida Ecosystems

Major aquatic systems in Central Florida provide habitat for the largest concentration of bald eagles in the lower 48 states. The Green Swamp, the Wekiva, the Upper St. Johns River and the Kissimmee River watershed are all under tremendous growth pressure. Audubon is working with regional governments and business leaders to map a plan to protect major components of these systems through purchase or to offset new development. The result will be permanent protection of large habitat areas to ensure the sustainability of Florida's eagle populations. The plan will provide additional emphasis on protecting habitat for other critical species including Florida scrub-jays.

Gulf Coastal Habitats

Building on the Coastal Islands Sanctuary and our chapters' legacy of protecting wading bird and shorebird colonies, the Gulf Coast Habitats program will mobilize public support for protecting and maintaining vital nesting and foraging areas. Audubon intends to balance the heavily-populated coastal areas with the needs of the wildlife that depend on the fragments of habitat left there. This requires pushing for clean water, wetlands protection and control of human impacts on nesting areas.

Northwest Coastal Habitats

Building on the work of chapters in the Panhandle, Audubon will redouble efforts to protect habitat and water resources along Florida's Northwest Coast. At the center of these efforts will be securing the commitments made in Bay County's West Bay Sector Plan to protect and restore up to 40,000 acres of marshes and land in West St. Andrew Bay. The plan proposes a focus on other coastal habitats from Escambia Bay to the Econfina for the benefit of resident and migratory bird species, and other plants and animals.

Atlantic Coastal Habitats

A concentration of Important Bird Areas (IBAs) along Florida's Atlantic coast and a noticeable decline in coastal bird populations points to the need for new efforts to inform and educate the public and decision-makers about the importance of these areas. As untouched coastal habitats dwindle, the importance of preserving these oases increases. The beaches of Northeast Florida are of critical significance to shorebirds. This region's marshes are also important.

Other Conservation Priorities

Audubon of Florida will continue to work with other groups to support long-term priorities such as protecting the Lake Wales Ridge, restoring the Ocklawaha River, protecting the Apalachicola and opposing offshore oil drilling.

Your Role is Key

Please support the 2006 Conservation Agenda by taking these actions:

1. Go to www.audubonofflorida.org and join the Florida Conservation Network to get regular email reports on policy issues.
2. Participate and take a leadership role with your local Audubon Society. Attend the regional conservation committee meetings where the six above-referenced programs are discussed.
3. Attend the annual Audubon Assembly in October 2006.
4. Speak with, write to, or call elected decision-makers and other public officials and ask them to support environmental laws and programs.
5. Underwrite Audubon of Florida's public policy programs with regular donations.

Together we can mitigate the consequences of growth by protecting Florida's land and water, and our birds and other wildlife.

Books Make Great Holiday Gifts

Specials from the Nature Store at Corkscrew



Photo of least tern and chick by Wayne Lasch

AUDUBON BOOKS 30% discount good through January 31, 2006

<i>2006 Audubon Engagement Calendar</i>	reg. \$12.95	now \$ 9.07
<i>Wild Love Affair - Essence of Florida's Native Orchids</i> by Connie Bransilver (autographed)	reg. \$40.00	now \$28.00
<i>In Search of The Ivory-Billed Woodpecker</i> by Jerome Jackson	reg. \$24.95	now \$ 17.47
<i>Audubon Life List and Journal</i>	reg. \$29.95	now \$20.97
<i>Death in The Everglades</i> by Stuart McIver (autographed)	reg. \$24.95	now \$ 17.47
<i>She's Wearing a Dear Bird on Her Head</i> by Kathryn Laskey (children's book)	reg. \$ 5.95	now \$ 4.89
<i>Stokes Purple Martin Book</i>	reg. \$12.95	now \$ 9.07

To order, call the Nature Store at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary 9:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. daily. Visa and MasterCard accepted. A minimal postage fee will be added to cover handling costs.

But hurry – Quantities are limited.

A great gift idea for the Holidays!

ADOPT-a-BIRD

Audubon Members Are Eligible for a Special Keepsake.

For your adoption gift of \$50 or more, you will receive a Harmony® Kingdom figurine of bald eagle "Braveheart," a collector's item not available to the general public. The offer is good through January 31, 2006. Quantities are limited, so take advantage of this unique opportunity.

An "adoption" is an annual investment in the care, feeding and medical treatment of birds brought to the Center for care, as well as those permanently housed for community education programs. What a great way to benefit Audubon Center for Birds of Prey while providing a thoughtful, practical gift that is the perfect size and won't be returned!

To request a brochure, call 407-644-0190 or write 1101 Audubon Way, Maitland, FL 32751
Visit us on line at <http://www.audubonofflorida.org/conservation/adopt.htm>

Photo of barred owl by Susie Warren



Julie Wraithmell, Conservation Associate



Audubon welcomes Julie Wraithmell, Conservation Associate. She works with AOF's policy team to mobilize grassroots support for issues including the Everglades, wildlife, water, growth, land protection and coastal conservation. Based in AOF's Tallahassee office, Julie supports legislative initiatives and works closely with chapters and members in the Panhandle.

As a conservation biologist for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for the last eight years, Julie oversaw development of the Great Florida Birding Trail, and coordinated the Wildlife Viewing Program of which the Trail is a part. The avid birdwatcher and conservationist is enthusiastic about her new focus on conservation policy and advocacy. Julie has a degree in biology from Duke University and is working toward a master's in geography at Florida State University.

"I look forward to bringing my wildlife background to bear on policy issues facing Audubon, and to making a better environment for all of us by fighting for a better environment for birds," said Wraithmell. Contact her at jwraithmell@audubon.org or call 850-222-BIRD.

Financial information about National Audubon Society can be obtained by writing to us at 700 Broadway, New York, 10003 or as stated below: NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY FLORIDA REGISTRATION # CH281: A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES BY CALLING TOLL-FREE, 1-800-435-7352 WITHIN THE STATE. REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL, OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE.

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“KEEP THE FIRES BURNING”

Second Annual AUDUBON ACADEMY

March 24 - 26, 2006 at Eckerd College, St. Petersburg, FL

Being a volunteer in an Audubon chapter should provide opportunities to accomplish something personally fulfilling while contributing to meaningful conservation goals. The goal of Audubon Academy 2006 is to supply the tools for building well-organized, effectively-led chapters, and – equally important – to provide the “why.” With positive feedback and helpful suggestions following the highly successful 2005 Audubon Academy, this chapters-driven event has evolved to include a personal element that will inspire and refresh even veteran volunteers.

The weekend starts with a social event Friday evening, March 24. Saturday opens with several hours of “just about as good as it gets” birding in Fort DeSoto Park (105 species were seen last year). Returning to campus, there will be thoughtfully-planned workshops including “Maximizing Your Role in Your Chapter,” “Tapping into the Money Stream”

Ft. DeSoto Sunset Photo by Christina Evans.

and “Designing Successful Conservation Projects.” At 5 p.m., sunset and Caribbean dinner back at Fort DeSoto Park means more opportunities for socializing and birding. Sunday includes a special session led by Virginia Farley of Reflective Conservation.

The Eckerd College location is a repeat of 2004. Registration is \$25 for the 3-day event. Rooms are available on campus for \$65 per night/double occupancy. Reasonably-priced food is available on campus; restaurants and other services are close by.

Registration forms for Audubon Academy 2006 will be available in January through Chapters and online at www.audubonofflorida.org.

For more information contact Joyce King, sjking@mindspring.com, 727-531-3440 or Jacqui Sulek, jsulek@audubon.org, 850-251-1297.

The annual Member’s Meeting will be held during Audubon Academy.

Details will be sent to all members.

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



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