

Florida Naturalist

**IN SEARCH OF THE
Ivory-Billed Woodpecker**

**AUDUBON'S 2007
Conservation Action Agenda**

**ASSEMBLY AWARDS RECOGNIZE
Excellence in Conservation**

**PROTECTING
Wood Storks and Wetlands**



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The Search for the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker



I fear I will never see an ivory-billed woodpecker, and that would be a shame. There is hope, though, that the ivory-billed is here in Florida, and if so, my fear may be for naught. It's a big, powerful bird, a foot and a half tall, with striking black and white markings, and a beak so strong it sounds like an anti-aircraft gun when banging through thick, old growth bark.

Earlier this year, Auburn University Professor Geoff Hill found evidence that ivory-billed woodpeckers may be in the Choctawhatchee River Basin of the Florida panhandle. For this reason, Audubon of Florida is supporting a search by Hill and a team of technicians. We have also encouraged our partners, the Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund, the Apalachee Audubon Society, the Bay County Audubon Society and the St Joe Companies to contribute financial resources to searching for this inspirational bird.

The ivory-billed woodpecker has inspired me and generations of others birders. Finding indisputable evidence of its existence calls attention to the fact that there are large remaining expanses of hardwood swamps that support the species. We all believe it's crucial to save these remaining and restored forests, and to expand the unique places in Florida that support the wildlife we see—and hope to see.

The last documented sighting of an ivory-billed was in 1944 in northeastern Louisiana. In Florida, the woodpeckers were last photographed in 1924, in Okeechobee County. Sadly, from the late 19th century through much of the 20th, an insatiable demand for hardwoods meant ever-expanding logging of forests in the United States. As a result, only eight or nine percent of our original forests remain. What you see in most of Florida, in most National forests and state parks, is secondary forest. A few remnants have been protected, and Audubon's Corkscrew Sanctuary—the last virgin swamp cypress—is one such forest. Muir Woods in northern California and Linville Gorge in the mountains of North Carolina are others. And we also have, a hundred years later, substantial tracts of swamp forest, which may support ivory-billed woodpeckers. There are forests of sufficient age with enough old, fallen trees hosting enough big, succulent grubs, that a specially-adapted woodpecker with a massive, powerful bill could do very well.

I desperately hope Geoff Hill and his colleagues return from the Choctawhatchee River Basin with clear, identifiable photos; or maybe one of them will walk out with an ivory-billed perched on a shoulder! I hope the birds are there. But whether there or not, I'll be happy for now knowing we're holding onto that habitat, and maybe adding to it.



David E. Anderson
Executive Director, Audubon of Florida



Courtesy of Historical Museum
of Southern Florida

AUDUBON APPROVES 2007 CONSERVATION ACTION AGENDA

The Audubon family gathered in Cocoa Beach in October for the annual Audubon Assembly and established a new 2007 Conservation Agenda. The agenda focuses on five statewide strategies and six strategic regional strategies. On this and the following page are excerpts from Audubon's priority focus areas. For the full 2007 Conservation Action Agenda, visit www.audubonofflorida.org.

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

Audubon calls on Florida's new governor and legislative leaders to dramatically increase the state's commitment to buying land for wildlife habitat, water resource protection, and for restoring the Everglades and Lake Okeechobee. Success will be measured by an annual commitment of up to \$1 billion for land conservation programs. Goals:

- Florida Forever - Spend the remaining Florida Forever funds in 2007, preparing the way for a replacement program that spends \$600 million a year.
- Everglades Restoration and Lake Okeechobee Recovery - Complete land acquisition for restoration projects by 2010.
- Conservation through Land Use - Encourage programs such as Rural Land Stewardship that use increased development density to pay for and conservation.
- Local and Regional Public Land Initiatives - Support land conservation at the local and regional level

Growth Management and Transportation: Florida's 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 natural areas. State policies must focus on citizen participation in regional planning, urban infill, diversion of highway projects away from intact ecosystems, and focused state review on ecosystems and natural areas.

Wildlife and Protected Species: Many species are at risk as a result of habitat alteration. Maintaining abundant resident and migratory wildlife populations requires increased understanding of wildlife needs. Goals:

- Laws and Rules to Protect Wildlife - Amend and strengthen Florida's protected species rules to increase emphasis on designation and protection of species and critical habitat, and on enforcement.
- Bird Conservation - Push policies and programs that help rare birds recover and keep common birds common.
- Endangered Species Act - Align with national campaigns to defend and advance federal environmental wildlife protection policies.

Water for the Environment: Water is a public resource and should be clean, safe, and managed for the benefit of natural systems. Florida's freshwater and estuarine systems have been heavily damaged by drainage, pollution, overuse, and mismanagement. Human water use must be balanced with environmental needs. Goals:

- Reserve Water to Preserve Nature - Uphold state policies and actions that allocate water to protect fish and wildlife and for the health of water bodies before human uses are permitted.
- Protect wetlands, floodplains and aquifers - Maintain, improve, and restore nature's storage capacity in order to reduce withdrawals and diversions from natural waterways.
- Pollution - Reduce human sources of pollution and clean up polluted waterways.

Global Warming: Human activities, primarily power generation and transportation, are causing overwhelming releases of greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, into the atmosphere. International scientific consensus concludes that the build-up of these gases is increasingly trapping heat and warming the earth's surface and atmosphere. The effects of global warming, including changes in climate, weather, and sea levels, is a leading threat to many bird species and the habitats on which they depend. The effects are likely to threaten human health and prosperity as well. Goals:

- Greenhouse Gas Targets - Promote local, state, and federal actions to set specific greenhouse gas emission-reduction goals.
- Clean Energy Alternatives - Promote adoption of clean and alternative energy sources and efficiency in transportation, and in energy production and use.
- State and Local Leadership - Engage the public and decision makers to create state and local pressure on the U.S. for national and international action to reduce the causes of global warming.

Audubon's Regional Conservation Priorities



Photo by R. J. Wiley

Audubon of Florida works regionally throughout the state's six regional conservation programs to deploy staff, chapter and volunteer leadership to create public and political support for ecosystem-based conservation. Regional programs will unite Audubon science, policy and grassroots efforts.

Everglades and Lake Okeechobee

Audubon continues its leadership role in promoting policy and science for Everglades Restoration and Lake Okeechobee and (downstream) estuary recovery. Audubon's focus is on 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, especially Everglades National Park and Florida and Biscayne Bays.

Audubon will push to upgrade Lake Okeechobee recovery with projects to clean up and store water entering the watershed. These efforts require billions of dollars to buy land and build projects. Restoration also means that water be used primarily for the environment instead of water supply to support growth.

Big Cypress Regional Ecosystems

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 the Florida panther and the wood stork, which suffer increasing pressure from development and population growth. Audubon is working with

allies to protect land, condition development impacts, and restore the freshwater flows in key areas from north of the Caloosahatchee 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 Coast Ecosystems

Building on the Coastal Islands Sanctuaries and Audubon chapters' legacy of protecting wading bird and shorebird colonies, the Gulf

Coast Ecosystems 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, restoring freshwater flows, protecting wetlands, and controlling 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 Bay area of St. Andrew Bay. Audubon will establish a nature center on West Bay to educate residents and visitors about the ecological benefits of coastal protection. The plan proposes a focus on other coastal habitats from Escambia Bay to the Econfinia River for the benefit of resident and migratory bird species, and other plants and animals.

Audubon of Florida to Host the Everglades Coalition 2007:

Kissimmee to the Keys - Standing firm for Everglades Restoration

January 18 - 21, 2007 in Kissimmee, Florida

Audubon of Florida will host the 2007 Everglades Coalition's 22nd annual conference. To be held at the Rosen Shingle Creek Resort and Golf Club at the headwaters of the Everglades ecosystem in Kissimmee, the event typically brings together 48 environmental, public interest, and conservation organizations. All have been working for more than two decades to restore the greater Everglades ecosystem.

The conference has two major themes: Standing firm for true ecosystem restoration and using the Kissimmee River restoration—successes, lessons learned, remaining issues to be addressed—as a tool to evaluate projects throughout the Everglades system. Issues related to the natural system, wildlife, endangered species, clean water, impacts of growth management, and strengthening the partnership to achieve

true environmental restoration goals are among the topics to be discussed.

For full information, and to register for the Everglades Coalition 2007, visit www.evergladescoalition.org

Restoring an ecosystem: **Kissimmee to the Keys**

Large volumes of flowing, clean water once defined the Greater Everglades Ecosystem from Kissimmee to the Keys. To restore this system, its ability to store and cleanse water must be re-established—a capacity impaired by years of drainage and development.

A thriving and sustainable South Florida requires a variety of restoration efforts, each targeted to meet slightly different needs. Creation of reservoirs, together with wetland restoration, land conservation, and improved land stewardship, are important steps toward this goal.

The Coastal Everglades are 95,000 contiguous acres of wetland habitat located in Miami-Dade County between Everglades and Biscayne national parks. They are the headwaters of both Biscayne and Florida bays and a life-giving component of South Florida's tourism-based economy. This ecosystem protects drinking water supplies and provides a necessary buffer against saltwater incursion. Sheetflow across these wetlands once created productive estuaries, supported commercial fisheries, and held vibrant communities of rosette spoonbills and wood storks. During the last century, flood protection and urban development in Miami-Dade County have drained this important habitat while sending damaging pulses of fresh water into the estuaries.

Several restoration projects by federal, state, and local agencies aim to restore the once-flourishing Coastal Everglades. Among these projects is a long-term planning study by Miami-Dade County to develop a land-use plan to ensure Biscayne Bay's health while supporting a vibrant economy of agriculture, recreation, tourism, and urban development. This "South Miami-Dade Watershed Study and Plan" encompasses a 370-square-mile-area in southeastern Miami-Dade County—more than half of the Coastal Everglades. Each drop of water and every activity within the watershed potentially affects the long-term health of the Coastal Everglades.

As in most areas of Florida, population growth and unchecked development pose enormous threats to the natural environment. Population in the South Miami-Dade watershed is projected to double in the next 50 years to 1.5 million. Existing development practices have



Photo of LaBelle by R. J. Wiley

pushed urban communities toward the Coastal Everglades, draining wetlands for development and flushing polluted water into estuaries and bays. The Watershed Study can provide an alternative plan, a future vision in which the life support system of the Coastal Everglades is protected and restored.

Audubon of Florida is an active participant on the Watershed Study Advisory Committee, a group of citizens that includes representatives from agriculture, homeowner associations, business, government agencies, and the environmental community. Together with the Tropical Audubon Society, we continually bring into the discussion the protection of the Everglades as a regional life support system. Through this participation, Audubon promotes a vision that will restore and protect the Coastal Everglades while enhancing quality of life.

As the County's five-year planning process draws to a close this winter, Audubon supporters are urged to get involved when the Watershed Study is presented to elected officials. Visit the Audubon of Florida website at www.audubonofflorida.org to learn more about the South Miami-Dade Watershed Study and how you can protect the Coastal Everglades, an essential component of South Florida's life support system.

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 2006. The following list recognizes donors from July 1, 2005 through June 30, 2006.

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*We apologize for any omissions
or errors on this list. Please
contact the Development Dept.
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corrections or additions.
Thank you.*

New Law Fosters IRA Gifts to Audubon

Recent legislation allows people 70 years of age and older to make a current gift of up to \$100,000 from traditional or Roth Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs). This development provides a new philanthropic vehicle for holders of IRAs. The advantage here is that while donors do not receive charitable tax deductions for their IRA gifts, they do avoid paying taxes on the gift amounts—taxes that would otherwise be payable upon withdrawal from an IRA.

At 70, owners of IRAs must begin taking taxable distributions from their plans. (Remember that IRAs were never intended to avoid taxes, only to defer them.) At 70 it is time to pay the piper. Many people may therefore find it more advantageous to make charitable gifts from their IRA accounts, rather than from other resources.

Note that this opportunity applies only to gifts made during 2006 and 2007. Be aware also that THE TRANSFER OF THE FUNDS MUST BE MADE DIRECTLY BY YOUR PLAN ADMINISTRATOR. Withdrawing money from your IRA and then giving it to the charity would be treated as a taxable distribution, thereby incurring some income tax liability.

If you would like to further explore the possibility of supporting Audubon of Florida with an IRA transfer, please call Development Director Tim Bachmeyer at 786-402-4841. Or call Audubon Vice President Wayne Mones at 212-979-3033.

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



MAJOR FORCES IN CONSERVATION: Philanthropy at Work

To no one's surprise, the success of the Green Revolution that has surged across America, and indeed the entire planet, is made possible by another form of "green," that is—philanthropic dollars. While American philanthropy predominantly tends to support religion, education, and health, there is a dedicated cadre across America that supports the environment as well.

The nature of this support is unique since charitable conservation work tends to be long-range, impacted by many forces—both natural and social—and often has political implications associated with it.

Audubon of Florida is fortunate in that it has benefactors who understand the unique demands of environmental work, and are prepared to provide the unique support that separates conservation from other charitable endeavors.

The Walt Disney World Company is a household name, one that has supported Audubon of Florida for almost three decades. Its Animal Kingdom experts regularly consult with the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey where Disney has supported major capital improvements, including the 100-foot raptor rehabilitation flight cage. Disney's Wildlife Conservation Fund grants also support scientific research at both our Tavernier Science Center in the Keys and at the Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries.

The Jessie Ball duPont Fund of Jacksonville, Florida, is another major funder of Audubon action. From capacity-building grants that help Audubon of Florida grow its computer systems, to developing outreach to constituencies around the state, to funding major conservation initiatives both nationally and in Florida, Audubon has been able to count on the Jessie Ball duPont Fund to support our work over many years. Support for new initiatives has been especially helpful, providing seed funding and leadership support that other foundations have then followed.

The Everglades Foundation and its chairman, Paul Tudor Jones, have been longtime collaborators with Audubon of Florida, with a laser-like focus on the protection and restoration of Florida's world-class jewel. With funding as well as advice in both science and policy, the Everglades Foundation intimately knows and willingly supports the unique challenges of conservation work.

Because of who they are, these organizations generate high-profile public awareness for Audubon philanthropy, as well as dollars that lend invaluable support to the Green Revolution. Audubon of Florida is grateful to them for their long-term friendships and for the continuing partnerships that infuse environmental philanthropy with deep and lasting commitment.

Doug Pitts has contributed personal time and energy, and directed corporate resources, to Everglades restoration

Winner of this year's Audubon Distinguished Philanthropist award, Doug Pitts, Sr. is a Floridian dedicated to protecting our paradise. Chairman of the Courtelis Company, a Miami-based real estate developer, Pitts has been active in environmental initiatives for more than a decade. He serves on Audubon of Florida's board of directors and on the Everglades Foundation's board.

Born near Cedar Key, Pitts lived in Kissimmee and Okeechobee before settling in South Florida. His father worked as an engineer for a road building company. "I grew up since age six in South Florida, and spent a lot of time out in the Everglades. I learned to love it," he said. But as early as the 1960s he began to notice changes. "The biggest threat we have is population growth—then and now."

His association with Audubon began when Mary Barley, widow of his friend George Barley, who died in plane crash 11 years ago, asked Pitts to help interview candidates for an Everglades Office. "Stuart Strahl got hired," Pitts said, "and that started my involvement. This work has been extremely educational; it opens your eyes to what the problems really are."

Pitts is also active with Audubon's Environmental Economics Council, a group that works to connect South Florida's business and environmental communities on sustainability issues. Laws restrict where development can go, but Pitts quietly notes that Courtelis tries to go beyond what the law requires.

"I think there should be some lines drawn around important wild places," he said, "and they should be protected from development."

"Doug is a man of few words, but tremendous substance," said David Anderson, Audubon of Florida's executive director. "His heartfelt dedication to the Everglades inspires us all."



Nora Jane and Miles Flowers inspect a pair of least tern chicks that are about to be returned—gently—to their home atop a flat roof. Members of the St. Petersburg Audubon Society use lightweight, long-handled tools they call “**chick-a-booms**” to put urban-dwelling least terns safely aloft again when they have tumbled down a gutter or over a roof’s edge. Other Audubon chapters are starting roof-nesting programs in areas where the terns’ normal breeding habitat is disappearing. *Photo by Ben Flowers.*

Florida’s Challenge: Act Now to Address Global Climate Change

The science is daunting. “If we pursue business as usual, an increase of five degrees Fahrenheit (give or take three degrees) over the twenty-first century seems inevitable,” concludes eminent scientist Tim Flannery, Ph.D., in his recent book *The Weather Makers: How Man is Changing the Climate and What it Means for Life on Earth*. “Today we face a rate of change thirty times faster (than the last recorded heating of the planet 10,000 to 20,000 years ago)—and because living things need time to adjust, speed is every bit as important as scale when it comes to climate change.”

Perhaps scarier are the effects of global climate change on birds, wildlife and plants. Extrapolating from scientific studies on the topic, Flannery writes “at least one out of every five living things on this planet is committed to extinction by existing levels of greenhouse gases. Now it seems countless thousands will be swept away by a rising tide of climate change unless greenhouse gas emissions are reduced. We must remember, however, that if we act now, it lies within our power to save two species for every one that is currently doomed. If we carry on business as usual, in all likelihood, three out of every five species will not be with us at the dawn of the next century.”

A prominent wetlands specialist, Robert Twilley, Ph.D., was the keynote speaker and led a panel on global climate change at Audubon of Florida’s Assembly in October 2006. He is also hopeful that we can make a difference to curb the worst impacts of a heating planet. “The debate in the scientific community isn’t whether there is global climate change, but about the specific mechanisms that control that change and what the magnitude of change will be in the future.” Dr. Robert Twilley told participants at the Assembly. “The bad news is that humans are part of the problem. The good news is the same—we are part of the problem. But it is only because we are connected to the problem that we have the capacity to deal with it. If global climate change were a force wholly outside us, as suggested by the idea that it is only a ‘natural cycle,’ then I’m afraid I’d see the situation as hopeless.”

The situation is not hopeless if we act quickly both individually and collectively to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that we release into the atmosphere, to protect natural areas that actually pull carbon out of the atmosphere, and to increase our energy efficiency.

So what steps have been taken in Florida to address global climate change? At the state level, Florida trails other states, such as California and northeastern states, in setting emissions reduction targets. During its last session, the Florida Legislature did take small steps toward encouraging policy and practice on this urgent issue. On May 5, 2006, the legislature enacted a comprehensive energy bill, Senate Bill 888. The legislation establishes a Florida Energy Commission, provides funds and tax incentives for energy-efficiency practices and renewable energy technologies, and encourages expansion of renewable energy in the state.

But Florida can and must do better: discouraging the most harmful energy generation methods (such as coal plants), undertaking an inventory of CO² emissions, and setting targets to reduce them are a few of the ways the state can act for our future.

South Florida cities can serve as examples. Nineteen Florida municipalities have joined a domestic effort to protect our future by signing onto the U.S. Mayors’ Conference Climate Protection Agreement. This agreement sets minimum CO² emissions reductions targets of seven percent, and ideally 15 percent, below 1990 levels by 2012. These reductions match those established in the Kyoto Protocol, an international agreement to reduce human-generated CO² emissions internationally. As of November 2, 2006, 326 mayors from 46 states representing a total of over 53 million citizens have signed the agreement. To learn whether your city is a part of this effort, visit: www.seattle.gov/mayor/climate.



Protecting the Wood Storks Means Protecting Wetlands

Corkscrew Swamp and its watershed is a special place. Most of Corkscrew's cypress trees were saplings when Columbus arrived in the New World 500 years ago. No records reveal how many wood storks nested there in 1492, but this keystone species was almost certainly more numerous than today's population.

The United States breeding population of the wood stork declined from an estimated 20,000 pairs in the 1930s to about 10,000 pairs by 1960. In 1984 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the wood stork as an endangered species. "At Corkscrew, we used to have 4,000 and 5,000 nesting pairs years ago," said Sanctuary Director Ed Carlson. "Now we get 400 to 600 nesting pairs. In an extraordinary nesting year, it can go to 1,000 nesting pair, but that's rare."

The birds' precarious situation, especially in southwest Florida's rookeries, is due primarily to the loss of suitable feeding habitat. The cause is well known: man-made levees, canals, and floodgates that have greatly changed natural water regimes in the region.

Weather, water, and food supply determine the wood stork nesting season's outcome. Wood storks require higher prey concentrations than other wading birds because of their unique feeding technique, and water levels are critical. It must be deep enough to ensure adequate food throughout the nesting season for both adults and chicks. (Each chick requires about 440 pounds of fish from hatch to independence.) Water must also be shallow enough (15 to 18 inches) for adults to hunt, with levels slowly receding to concentrate fish in ponds and puddles for easy harvesting.

Water and food levels must remain adequate from late December,

when the adults begin to arrive, through the end of nesting season in late May and early June. If conditions are unfavorable, adults will either fail to nest or abandon their nests. Water, preferably with alligators present, is essential around the bases of the colony's nesting trees to keep raccoons and other predators from climbing up to eat eggs or chicks.

The chicks must fledge before the rainy season starts, usually in late spring and early summer because once water levels rise, the food supply disperses. Without a concentrated food resource, adults will abandon the nestlings.

To protect this fragile species, we must protect its habitat. That is why Audubon is working so hard to convince state and federal authorities not to permit the destruction of thousands of acres of short hydro-period wetlands in Cocohatchee Slough near Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.

In November 2006, despite compelling scientific evidence and thousands of letters and petitions from the public, the South Florida Water Management District voted to allow the destruction of more than 650 acres of wetlands for a residential development known as Mirasol. District governing board members, continuing a disturbing trend of ignoring public input, refused to consider scientifically-substantiated information provided by a coalition of conservation groups.

Documentation showed not only the illegal cumulative loss of wetlands, but real jeopardy to the endangered wood stork population at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. This big-picture perspective was ignored by the District, which seems intent on destroying one part of the Everglades while claiming to restore another. Audubon has no choice but to challenge the destructive permit in a state administrative hearing process.

Congratulations

Florida Monthly magazine has named Corkscrew's Blair Audubon Center as Florida's Best Nature Center for 2006. Congratulations to Ed Carlson and his entire staff for this tremendous award. Audubon is proud of the efforts that led to this well-deserved recognition by the readers of a state-wide publication. Visit Corkscrew in the winter months to see painted buntings like the one on the cover, and an array of other birds and wildlife.

Successful Assembly in Cocoa Beach

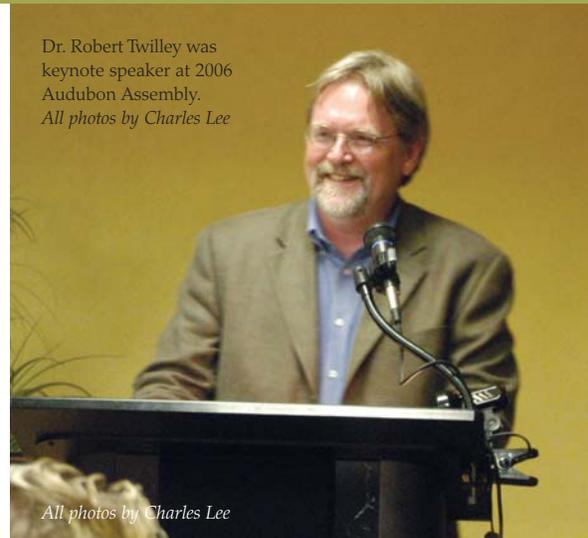
Every year, barring a hurricane, the Audubon family gets together to celebrate successes, learn and share ideas, and build the Conservation Action Agenda for the year to come. Acting together we are more effective in reaching our goals of protecting land, water resources, and especially Florida's magnificent birds.

The 2006 Audubon Assembly in Cocoa Beach, was a truly inspiring weekend. Nearly two hundred participants from Audubon of Florida and 35 of the 43 Audubon chapters spent a weekend beside the beach, participated in field trips on the Indian River Lagoon, learned about birds vs. coastal development, climate change, lobbying in Washington D.C., and other important issues.

Audubon chapters, philanthropists, and conservation heroes were recognized with awards. An Assembly highlight was the presence of Robert Twilley, Ph.D., a wetlands specialist and leading scientist on climate change. He led the climate change learning session and was keynote speaker at the awards dinner Friday night.

The Assembly culminated with a dynamic session at which Auduboners from across Florida debated and approved the 2007 Conservation Action Agenda. All six regional agendas and five conservation strategies were unanimously approved by the Assembly.

Dr. Robert Twilley was keynote speaker at 2006 Audubon Assembly.
All photos by Charles Lee



All photos by Charles Lee

Audubon Chapters Shine

Chapter honorees received practical awards—DVDs on “Watching Warblers” or “Watching Sparrows”—together with framed certificates. “The DVDs will be useful tools as Chapter members continue to share with others their passion for birds and Florida's special places,” noted Jacqui Sulek, Chapters Coordinator.



CONSERVATION - Manatee County Audubon Society

The project that won 2006 Best Chapter Conservation Project began four years ago, when Otis Felts gave 30 acres of undeveloped land to the Manatee Audubon Society. Through careful planning and physical labor, the Felts Preserve team has undertaken clean-up,

restoration and management of this beautiful place. Set in the midst of development, the preserve has a new bird blind that lets visitors enjoy 100 species of birds. The commitment of Steve Black and his team is a legacy for those involved, and a gift to the community. Manatee County Audubon hopes to establish an environmental education center on the Felts Preserve. Steve Black, project coordinator, and Arlene Flisik, Chapter vice president, accepted the award.

EDUCATION - Oklawaha Valley Audubon Society

Audubon of Florida relies on volunteers to carry out community education, and a 550-member chapter has made a big difference in Lake County. With guidance and inspiration from education chair Mary Anderson, Oklawaha Valley Audubon and Lake County, Florida, celebrated their third annual Audubon Adventures Day. Nine thousand copies of "The Watery World of Water Birds" were given to third, fourth and fifth grade students. Four hundred teaching manuals, a 30-minute DVD on local water birds, essay contests and prizes engaged the community on all levels. The County Commission and Lake County School Board proclaimed April 19, 2006, as "Audubon Adventures Day" and the National Audubon Society recognized the Chapter's inspiring efforts. Mary Anderson represented the chapter to receive the award.

BEST CHAPTER AWARD - Francis M. Weston Audubon Society

The Roy Hyatt Education Center is a 125-acre preserve owned and—until two years ago, operated—by the Escambia County School system. When school board funding cuts threatened to close the facility, members of Francis M. Weston Audubon Society stepped in, funding a part time naturalist last year. Led by Annelise Reunert and Jim Brady, they obtained a \$75,000 grant to expand and enhance the environmental education programs at Hyatt Education Center. Their dedication, imagination and vision have inspired and engaged the whole community, given strength and focus to the Chapter's volunteers, and provided a gift to the children of Escambia County. Jim Brady, who gave an inspiring presentation about the project at the Assembly, accepted the award.



CHAPTER DISPLAY AWARDS

Named **Most Unique** was the **Alachua Audubon Society's** display of a kestrel nest box together with a live kestrel borrowed from The Audubon Center for Birds of Prey. The award for **Best Chapter Display** went to **Pelican Island Audubon Society**. Judged on content and aesthetics, it offered a clear, attractive review of the chapter's activities and member participation, thanks in part to fine photography by Bob Montanero.



AUDUBON ACADEMY APPRECIATION AWARD - Joyce King

Three years ago Joyce King developed the concept of a weekend Academy "for the Chapters, and by the Chapters, in order to address the special needs of volunteers." With two extremely successful events behind her, King is putting together the third annual Audubon Academy, to be held March 23 - 25 2007. Her vision, creativity, dedication and hard work have provided the tools that are now being used for Conservation all over Florida. Appropriately, the award is inscribed "Our Audubon team is stronger than ever thanks to you, Joyce."



Pictured left to right: Dennis Duke, Eva Armstrong, Laurilee Thompson, David Anderson, Jim Swann; and Kim Sands, who represented the Walt Disney World Company.

State Conservation Leaders Recognized at Assembly

Congratulations to four of Florida's top conservationists, who were recognized at the Audubon Assembly in Cocoa Beach

Jeb Bush, Eva Armstrong put together an unprecedented string of conservation success stories, including the 74,000-acre Babcock Ranch purchase.

Teddy Roosevelt Award, Jim Swann, for leadership on behalf of land and water conservation. Relentless advocate Jim Swann has used his influence with state political leaders to shape important decisions leading to Preservation 2000, Florida Forever, and other crucial conservation programs.

Guy Bradley Award, Laurilee Thompson, for courageous advocacy for Florida's wildlife heritage. A fifth-generation Floridian, Laurilee Thompson has consistently invested her personal and professional time and capital in projects to benefit the ecology and economy of Florida, while building popular support for conservation.

Champion of the Everglades, Dennis Duke. As chief of the Restoration District for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Dennis Duke has worked tirelessly to advance the project components of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan.



Bird Counts: Enjoyable, Family-Oriented Ways to Help and Learn

Birders spotted this ovenbird at the Fisheating Creek Campground (see story on next page), where the group stayed before and after the “big day” of the North American Migration Count.
Photo by Don Margeson.

The 107th Christmas Bird Count: December 14, 2006, to January 5, 2007

Audubon programs like the Great Back Yard Bird Count and the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) rely on citizen science initiatives to gather information that is vital to conservation efforts.

Each year, results of the CBC, which runs from December 14 through January 5 inclusive, are compiled into the longest-running database in ornithology, representing over a century of unbroken data trends. The count uncovers local trends in bird populations, valuable for pinpointing signs of habitat fragmentation, or they may signal

environmental threats such as groundwater contamination or poisoning from pesticides. Those who take part in the CBC do it for the love of birds and the excitement of friendly competition. But above all, they know that their efforts are making a difference for science and birds.

First held in 1998, the Great Backyard Bird Count (held in February) now involves more than 600,000 people, who may submit more than 50,000 checklists containing more than 600 bird species and sightings of more than six million

individual birds. As a simple, entry-level, short-term project, this event provides a gateway for people of all ages and experience relate to conservation activities.

To get involved in the Christmas Bird Count and the Great Backyard Birdcount, contact your local Audubon chapter or visit www.audubon.org



Donate

Visit www.audubonofflorida.org. Click on Support Audubon to support important initiatives, or mail your contribution to Audubon of Florida, 444 Brickell Avenue, Suite 850, Miami FL 33131

Members of Audubon's newest chapter join in North American Migration Count

On September 16, members of some of Florida's most seasoned Audubon chapters banded together with the newest to initiate a North American Migration Count in two of Florida's least-visited counties, Hendry and Glades.

Hendry-Glades Audubon became Florida's newest chapter (number 43) earlier this year, and hit the ground running. These two rural, inland counties on the western shores of Lake Okeechobee still include some remarkable natural areas, including places like Fisheating Creek Wildlife Management Area between Palmdale and Lakeport. This state-owned conservation area shelters the last unaltered tributary to Lake Okeechobee (Fisheating Creek), as well as phenomenal river swamps, hammocks, dry prairies, and marshes that provide habitat for wild turkey, swallow-tailed kites and some of the biggest alligators in Florida!

Inspired by a recent visit to Fisheating Creek, St. Petersburg Audubon members Lorraine and Don Margeson wanted to introduce other birders to the area and contribute to the conservation of this region, dubbed "Florida's Freshwater Frontier." Together with Hendry-Glades secretary Margaret England, they coordinated the first annual North American Migration Count in the area, organizing Audubon members from St. Petersburg, Tampa, and Highlands Audubon chapters, and the Caloosa Bird Club, to travel to South Florida and help Hendry-Glades members document this region's migratory bird diversity.

Joined by Audubon of Florida's Lake Okeechobee Science Coordinator Dr. Paul Gray, the effort garnered enough participants to mount five survey teams to explore the two-county area by car, foot, and kayak during the day-long census.

High water on many of the area's public lands made access challenging. Nevertheless, the day's efforts yielded a whopping 9,848 birds, representing 95 species in Glades County and 40 species in Hendry. Species highlights included both least and American bitterns, king rail, bobolink, fulvous and black-bellied whistling ducks, short-tailed hawk, 23 crested caracaras, and a single least flycatcher! The Margesons provided a barbeque dinner for all the participants and, best of all, the count was heralded in the Glades County Democrat as a shining success.

"This area represents the diversity and unspoiled habitat that was once widespread throughout Florida," said Margaret England, "but when you live here, you can take it for granted. Such overwhelming interest in this survey helped us demonstrate to our local community just how remarkable Hendry and Glades counties really are."

Hendry-Glades Audubon is Florida's newest Audubon chapter. For more on their events, activities and birding their area (including trips to South Florida birding Mecca STA-5), visit www.orgsites.com/fl/hgaudubon/.

The 6th Annual Big O Birding Festival will be held in Glades and Hendry counties March 30-April 1, 2007. Visit www.bigobirdingfestival.com or call 863-946-0300 for more info.

For more on Fisheating Creek Wildlife Management Area, visit www.floridaconservation.org/recreation/fisheating_creek

The North American Migration Count is sponsored in Florida by the Florida Ornithological Society and is supported by countless Audubon chapters. For more information, visit www.fosbirds.org/namc/Spring_2006.htm



DISCOVER Florida ranch country

The Heart of Florida: 2007 Calendar with photos by Carlton Ward Jr. reveals landscapes, wildlife and ranching culture from 18 cattle ranches in 14 counties. Essays tell what makes this heartland so special—cowboys who are legacy to America's longest ranching history and wildlife that cannot survive without their protection. Visit www.upf.com and www.floridaheartland.com. Purchases support the Florida Cattlemen's Foundation and LINC Foundation.



Nature photos on view at Brooker Creek Preserve

Photographs by Christina Evans, whose images are familiar to readers of this publication, are on exhibit through December 30 at the Brooker Creek Preserve Educational Center in Tarpon Springs. Evans' show, "In My Own Backyard: Finding Florida in the Suburbs," offers intimate views of the beauty and diversity of life that can be cultivated on a suburban lot in Florida's most densely populated county. The Center at 3940 Keystone Road, Tarpon Springs, is open Wednesday-Sunday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Call 727-453-6800 for details.

Conservation Milestone

300th Bald Eagle released by Center since 1979

The release of Audubon Center for Birds of Prey's 300th rehabilitated bald eagle marked a monumental milestone this September. Bobby Ginn, President and CEO of the Ginn Company, released the 300th bald eagle September 8 at Reunion Resort in Kissimmee. The eagle, found on the ground and unable to fly, was rescued and received emergency treatment by wildlife rehabilitator Leslie Johnson. The bird was then transferred to Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland. After medical treatment of his wounds and conditioning in the 100-foot flight cage, the eagle was ready for release less than one month after his rescue.

This eagle had been involved in a territory fight with another eagle and as a result suffered multiple puncture wounds and severe bruising. Loss of habitat from increased development can lead to such territory disputes, usually when Florida's eagles are returning to their nest sites.

Reunion was chosen as the release location because of the unique relationship that has developed between the Ginn Company and Audubon of Florida. When nesting eagles took up residence at a Ginn construction site at the Tesoro community in St. Lucie County, owner Bobby Ginn stopped all activity and established a 1,500-foot protection zone around the new nest site. Parts of the golf course and clubhouse under construction had to be relocated, and a number of residential lots have been redesigned to accommodate the nesting birds. These changes resulted in over \$25 million dollars in lost sales on behalf of the eagles.

After discussions with Audubon of Florida, Ginn provided funding for a "Friends of the Eagle" partnership with Audubon. The program includes an eagle ambassador program to educate the public about bald eagles, their place in the environment and the importance of protecting this national symbol; the installation of an Internet eagle cam to monitor the nesting activity



Bobby Ginn prepares to release a bald eagle back into the wild.

of the "Tesoro" eagles, and a 200-acre conservation easement encompassing the eagle's nest and nearby foraging territory. Live streaming video will be available at www.audubonofflorida.org.

Bobby Ginn and his company are an extraordinary example of the cooperation that can and must exist between developers and conservationists if Florida's bald eagle population is to continue to recover. This bald eagle, the 300th released by the Center since 1979, symbolizes not only our nation, but also the success of Audubon's education, conservation and rehabilitation work on behalf of the species' recovery.



Looking for the perfect gift for the people on your list who have everything?

Look no further than a beautiful raptor!

Eagles, owls, hawks, kites, falcons, and even vultures are the perfect solution. An adoption packet includes a certificate, photo, biography and species information, starting at \$35. Download an adoption form at www.audubonofflorida.org, or call 407-644-0190 for more information. All adoption donations benefit the birds at The Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland, Florida.

For more information contact Audubon Center for Birds of Prey 407-644-0190 or visit us on line at www.audubonofflorida.org/who_centers_CBOP_adoptabird.html



Bob Kelley

Remembering Robert Lee Kelley 1937-2006

Florida lost a charismatic naturalist when Bob Kelley died this summer. On August 20, more than 200 of his best friends gathered at the Doc Thomas House in South Miami (headquarters of Tropical Audubon Society, of which he was president from 1979-1989) to celebrate the life of this beloved mentor. "It was a warm and tender event with much humor, and a lovely reflection of such a dear man," said Cynthia Guerra, the Chapter's executive director. One friend described Bob as "the most community-active member of the Biology Department," despite the fact that his University of Miami job was as professor of mathematics, not biology. Dedicated to teaching appreciation of South Florida nature, Bob was instrumental in establishing the Natural Areas Management program in Miami-Dade Parks in the early 1980s. This gentle bear of a man led bird watching trips, helped establish horticulture and agricultural programs, and took children on spider-walks at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden. Bob generally left the earth a better place for his having been on it.

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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Third Annual AUDUBON ACADEMY

March 23-25, 2007 Continuing Education Center, Eckerd College, St. Petersburg



Photo of Wilson's plover by Christina Eoans

Chapters are the crucial link to communities when it comes to acting on initiatives that protect Florida's birds and their habitats. Besides becoming familiar with local birds, chapter leaders must be knowledgeable about conservation outcomes that will result in the desired protection. Veterans and newcomers alike have praised the effectiveness of this low-cost weekend conference, designed to develop, strengthen, and sharpen each participant's skills.

Conservation-focused workshops include status reports on birds in each Florida region, conservation project planning, strategies for saving land for birds, connecting agency professionals with birders, how to teach your community about birds, exploring a wealth of fundraising opportunities, and a valuable orientation session for new Chapter leaders.

Featured speaker will be Charles Lee, Audubon of Florida's Director of Advocacy. A force for conservation for 30 years, he knows Florida's birds and special places better than most. Social gatherings and field trips to nearby Fort DeSoto will add to the fun and help build camaraderie.

Registration for the Academy is \$25. Reasonably-priced food is available on campus and at nearby restaurants. Motel rooms at \$60/night are available on the Eckerd campus, just steps from the sessions. Call 727-865-7000 to reserve accommodations.

**For more details visit www.audubonofflorida.org.
Joyce King will answer questions at sjking@se.rr.com or 352-475-1999.**

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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