

South East Volusia Audubon Society

Nov 7, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Marsha Cox, Bill Cox, Traci Hershberger, Jane Talbot, Jenifer Russell, Liz Merideth, Robert Merideth, Richard Fasse, Ed Carlson, Bob Chew, Joyce Riddel, Gail Rogers, John Kendal

Updates from board members:

Liz Merideth is on the communications committee. She reported that the November newsletter will go out today. It is difficult to get the newsletter out on the 1st of the month or a few days before, and she is asking for help. Liz's goal is to get the newsletter out on the first of month or a few days earlier but this is sometimes difficult. She could use help with this from members by agreeing to write articles. She is looking for people to write the bird of the month column; Richard will do Purple Martins for January, Bill will do December, Jane will do February and Joyce will do March. Liz will send out an email asking for folks to sign up for the remaining months. This month's newsletter features the first column of conservation champions with Doris Leeper. Liz is looking for folks to provide more regular content. Everyone should send her updates on what is going on, Plants 4 Birds, Conservation, and articles like John's birding out the door in this month's newsletter. Liz will send an email with her requests, more regular articles so she has a cache to pull from. Articles don't need to be on birding. Traci volunteered that she is good at last minute stories.

Action item: Liz will email her requests for the newsletter. All should respond.

Communications Committee Robert has agreed to become the new Communications Committee Chair.

Robert reported that the committee met on Sunday to discuss small tasks and activities for the upcoming season. Going forward he would like to develop a plan or guide for communications, look strategically at who we should target, what we are trying to communicate to them, how often, why are we talking to them and how are we doing it? Currently we have the website which is passive and the main library of our content. This is where folks go if they are looking for something. The Newsletter is like an annual report sent out monthly with a comprehensive picture of everything the group is doing. It is attractive, colorful, and goes beyond communication just to members. It can be used as PR. The limitation is that it is not as timely for new items because it is only published monthly. Social media, Facebook, Meetup, Instagram are good ways to update people on upcoming events, but folks must subscribe or follow. E-mail was the most popular communication channel among members surveyed last year. Almost everyone has e-mail, and it is very timely. News can get out quickly as compared with the Newsletter. We also have print media, brochures, educational materials, signage which are primarily for outreach, to recruit and let folks know about Plants 4 Birds and Purple Martins, etc. We can also do presentations, write op ed pieces or articles in journals or magazines. All have advantages and disadvantages. Robert would like to tie all channels together and back to the who, what and why of communication. Which channels target each group, provide a coordinated approach, style guidelines on language and photos, protocols on how we use each channel. Robert will develop the "plan and guide" for communication committee. Decisions will be made by consensus. Robert mentioned the potential to move to Mailchimp or something similar for mailings. Liz is familiar with Mailchimp, and it is free for lists of less than 500. Other ideas are a possible weekly e-mail of upcoming activities and a where to go birding locally brochure. Liz has been posting events on Facebook, joined local "what's happening" groups, and other Florida Audubon pages trying to branch out.

Action item: Liz and Jane will work to spruce up the website.

Plants 4 Birds Joyce reported lots of activity. Audubon started as a conservation group, not just birding, and Florida Audubon is really focusing on conservation. Each chapter has committed to their conservation activities. Plants 4 Birds is one effort, but Audubon is also working with government at all levels, and with developers to save our watersheds, maintain our ecosystems by thwarting development,

and working to protect the Florida corridor for migratory animals and birds. Our chapter was selected to receive a Plants 4 Birds grant for the 4th year. Money will be here in December, Joyce is working on where to spend it.

Updates on the individual gardens:

MDC – special thanks to Dean Spears for keeping an eye on the garden, visiting weekly or biweekly to keep it in top shape. Richard also helps with this garden. Joyce would like to get more people to the garden, have more activities. She will be meeting with Carly, the program manager at MDC, to discuss what types of tours and education programs we can sponsor at the garden and the Purple Martin site. The MDC hosts lots of homeschool kids, camps and adult programs. When they have visitors, we want to be a part of it. More ID labels are needed for some new plants. Dean and Joyce also talked about putting in a few more signs, possibly listing plants and what birds and pollinators are attracted by them. Also possibly a sign regarding migratory birds in our east coast pathway, what birds are helped by the garden.

Chisolm Elementary – SEVAS has developed a great relationship with the 4th grade science teacher. Joyce is hoping to expand this to other classes to involve more staff and students. Chisolm has two gardens. Birds love them because there are plenty of seeds, but the garden needs to be spruced up to be in showcase shape. Last year we were able to deliver four backpacks containing Sibley Guides, folding guides, magnifying glasses and bug information, and binoculars. We also provided a bird bingo game for the class. With additional funding, we would like to provide more backpacks. Joyce reports that we need to plan events such as tabling where we have tables showing how to use binoculars, how to do bird lists, eBird and Merlin tutorials. EBird and Merlin can be installed on student computers, and students should be shown how to use them on their home phones. The next big investment will be two more gardens, a meadow with drought tolerant low maintenance plants and a micro-forest. Sarasota Audubon has done a micro-forest. This can be another educational opportunity for the school, teaching what forests do for the environment. John Kendall suggested planting Ficus trees as they attract a lot of birds. Joyce may also want to do a bioblitz, where teams survey a section of the property identifying every flora and fauna there.

Babe James – this garden has had a tough start. The center has had lots of staff turnover. At the end of the month, Joyce will meet with the new program manager to plan upcoming programs. The garden doesn't look good, there has been no maintenance over the summer. Lindley's Nursery will look at the garden and decide how to make it more self-sustaining. Dean suggested ground cover. Richard and the kids made an owl box last year, this will be installed soon with the cities help. Bob mentioned that he may have a contact for maintenance at Babe James, and will reach out to his friend.

Myrtle Park – Laura Devlin has maintained this garden, and done a great job. Mold is an issue on the native coffee plants, they may have to be replaced with Azalias. Joyce is working with the city to get water from the front to the back of the garden, which needs water. Joyce is also working with the New Smyrna Museum of History to do a tour of this garden. Myrtle Park connects to the original canal system of New Smyrna Beach. Greg, the director of the museum, will meet with Joyce.

Volunteers are needed to do maintenance, specifically at Chisolm and Babe James to be the eyes and ears of the gardens. Someone to go out monthly to see the status of the gardens and report issues. We do have funding to invest where it is needed.

Bill reports visiting the garden at the MDC, and seeing folks sitting on the bench enjoying the garden. This area is now the trailhead for the rail trail and the bathrooms are open. There should be more activity in the area.

Action item:

Bob will reach out to his contact at Babe James to see if he can find someone to do the maintenance there.

Tabling – Gail is now the tabling event coordinator. She will send out a list of upcoming events. The next event is November 18th at the NSB Farmer’s Market. Gail needs folks to volunteer to man the tables. Richard and Dean will do setup and take down. Gail needs the updated projects board, and asked for a print of the flamingo. She needs items to sell, crafts, etc. Gail made clam shell ornaments, bottles, mushroom gnome ornaments, and has a tree she can use to display on Nov 18th. There will also be tabling at the NSB Farmer’s Market on December 9th. On December 16th, there is an event at the Atlantic Center for the Arts. For that event, we are supposed to have an activity for kids. Gail has supplies for the kids to make flamingo ornaments. Gail has one black table cloth, but needs a second one. She would also like a printed copy of the newsletter and sign-up sheets for memberships and e-mail. Gail will send details of what is needed.

Richard suggested taking the design that Liz did and making some hats and stickers. All voted in favor of the new design and purchase.

Action items:

- Gail will send details of what she needs for tabling.
- Richard will use Liz’s design and make some hats and stickers.

Conservation

Bob Chew reported that he will soon launch his boat at Biolab Road and do a survey of the seagrass and lagoon. He will take pictures and do a report for the newsletter. Bob has been here for 10 years and has been working to “rewild” his property. He may write about it and have a meeting at his house to show what he has done. Bob would like to see us develop something for new homeowners to teach them to be Florida Friendly. Most folks just plant St. Augustine grass, but information on native alternatives is confusing and requires a lot of research from the homeowner. Bob would like to produce something that could be distributed by local welcome wagons and at our events. He would also like to see a regular tip published in the Hometown News. Bob and Marsha met with a former Hometown News employee who was getting the name of the correct contact person.

Bob would also like to do an event where boats are used to take folks out in the lagoon where the MDC boat can’t go. Bob will try to get his fishing club to volunteer.

Action items:

- Bob will work to get his fishing club to volunteer to take folks out on the lagoon.
- Bob and Marsha will work to get a weekly tip published in the Hometown News
- Bob will write about his work to “rewild” his property

Finance

Jenifer reports our cash balances are stable at approximately \$7,900. Spent vs. income was about even last year. If more expenditures are planned for this year, more income will need to be generated. Paid membership was up last year, and must be kept up. Jenifer will get the total number of paid memberships. Reminder, all board members should be paid members.

Action item: All board members who have not yet paid their dues should do so.

Christmas bird count

The count is on December 30th. If you want to participate, please e-mail Jenifer and Marsha. There will be a wrap up social event after the count.

Action item: All who want to participate in the CBC should contact Jenifer and Marsha.

Other business

John Kendall is helping Ed with shorebirds and helping Richard and team with the Purple Martins. John setup a text group for rare bird alerts (other sightings such as right whales which may be of interest are permitted also). Purpose is to quickly get the word out to interested parties, not for chatting. Notify John if you would like to be included in the text chain.

Richard reports newly donated Purple Martin gourds and house, and the donation of an endoscope for nest monitoring. If we have a full colony, the new gourds may be used, but they are older style and can have problems with starlings. PuMa group will need to decide.

Marsha reported that Chip Franke will be doing bird walks at Canaveral and wanted to say they are sponsored by SEVAS. The walks could be publicized by SEVAS. All voted yes.

Marsha reported that SEVAS was voted Audubon Chapter of the Year! She will have cake at the Thursday speaker meeting to celebrate.

Question was raised that board meetings in the past had been open to all, should this continue? Consensus is that opening board meetings up to the public would include too many people. To keep interested folks informed, a few remarks about what we are doing and referring people to the board meeting on the website can be made at the Thursday speaker meeting. There can also be a column in the newsletter asking for volunteers where they are needed.

Marsha announced that Jaqui Sulek, who has been a huge supporter of SEVAS, is retiring from Audubon in February. Marsha would like to have Jaqui come to SEVAS for a visioning meeting before she retires. All agree.

Action item: Marsha will work to schedule Jaqui for a visioning meeting

Marsha asked if the group would be willing to do joint trips or meeting with Halifax Audubon, all agree.

Ed asked about a possible Plants 4 Birds garden at Smyrna Dunes. Marsha said we may be able to get funding, but it would not be under our current Plants 4 Birds program.

Bob recommended initiating a tiered level membership, similar to what MDC and other Audubon chapters do. This gives people the opportunity to give more than the stated membership "dues" and rewarding higher levels of giving with a "special event". The suggestion was made to name the tiers after birds. All thought this was a good idea. This would be something for the membership committee to consider.

John would like to see an observation deck at Canaveral lot 5 and asked for a starting point contact. Who would have to approve this and how could funds be raised?

Meeting adjourned at 5:30

Minutes submitted by Jane Talbot

Addendum: Membership report

Dean reports from Membership that an audit of the Membership roster is the order of business to start a new year. (2023-2024 Oct-Sept)
158 Roster members receive our email correspondence

60 Active members. We define "Active" as having paid dues or participated in a SEVAS event over the last 2 years

29% of Roster members paid dues last SEVAS year

Currently 15% of Roster members have paid dues for this SEVAS year. (10% of that are due to the "grace period" voted in at a prior board meeting).

We will submit a dues appeal in the Skimmer above the Membership application.