

THE Skimmer

October 2023



SOUTHEAST VOLUSIA AUDUBON SOCIETY (SEVAS) NEWSLETTER | PUBLISHED OCT-APRIL

Vagrants: Pioneers or Sirens? by Marsha Cox

Flamingos in Ohio. Northern Gannet in CA. Roseate Spoonbill in WI. Increasing vagrants and extreme weather excite and concern.

It starts with a rare bird alert on your phone or a call from a fellow birder about an unusual sighting. There is nothing more exciting for a birder than to see a rare bird, one that is somehow in a place that is not its "usual habitat." ***Spoiler Alert: this is not a scientific treatise on vagrants, just some observations and questions.*

Vagrants or "accidentals," are birds likely displaced from their usual route by chance. Whenever these birds wander beyond their expected ranges, they naturally intrigue ornithologists due to their unusual presence. And, they can offer useful insights into migration patterns, environmental shifts, and ecological factors.

Our personal experience with a vagrant was last winter when a Yellow-breasted Chat arrived in our yard in NSB. He stayed about two months then disappeared about the usual migration time. When he left I felt that he would be safely breeding somewhere farther north in his usual habitat. And I [continued on page 5](#)



Yellow-breasted Chat
photo: Rhododendrites

Purple Martin Project by Richard Fasse

Hard work pays off with a new colony established!

Last season we successfully raised four Purple Martins in our gourd colony at the Marine Discovery Center. We hope they will return with some friends and establish a new and larger colony this season.

Historically in our area Purple Martin "scouts" return around mid-January. But last season there were reports of December arrivals, so we plan to raise our gourd rack right after New Years. We will have a public "raising" event and ask for volunteers to help prepare the gourds. We are hoping for 80% occupancy this season. Stay tuned for an announcement about that event.

We have received a generous donation of used gourds and a nearly new Purple Martin "hotel" to complement our plastic gourds. When the snowbirds are all back the PM Project volunteers will try to figure out how to incorporate the donated housing with our existing system.

The earliest we expect to see eggs would be in February, but we could [continued on page 5](#)



Purple Martin
photo: r fasse

First of Season Monthly Meeting

**Oct 12, 7pm
Marine Discovery Center**

Welcome Back! Our speaker is Christie Miller, from the **Lyonia Environmental Center (LEC)** in Deltona.

Christie will speak about her new role managing LEC, Scrub- Jays, and all their great programs. She will also talk about **Jay Watch**, Audubon Florida's community science program, dedicated to protecting Florida Scrub-Jays, our state's only endemic bird species.

Please join us - our meetings are open to all.

*"Ah Florida!
My favorite color
is the ocean."*

INSIDE

- Presidents' Post 2
- Save the Dates 3
- SEVAS in the Field 3
- The BirdWord Puzzle 4
- Volunteer with SEVAS 5
- Bird of the Month 6
- Become a Member 6



Our mission: Protecting birds and their habitats through Education, Advocacy, and Action.

The Southeast Volusia Audubon Society (SEVAS) was started in the early 1970s as the New Smyrna Beach Audubon Society by a group of neighbors who were interested in protecting the local birds and wildlife around Smyrna Dunes Park. We are now one of three Audubon Florida chapters in Volusia County, each with its own identity and focus.

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PRESIDENTS' POST

Welcome Back!

Greetings! Again it seems almost unbelievable that Summer has clearly moved on to Autumn, but here we are.



White Ibis
 photo: lip kee

The leaves were just starting to change here in Vermont as we began our slow return to Florida. The move often brings multiple feelings for us and many other snowbirds as well, I'm sure. Excited to return but nonetheless it's always difficult to leave.

So what was your Summer like? Hot and damp for the Floridians I am sure. Very wet, cool and quick for me here in New England. My question to you all is, "Ready or not, how can you contribute to another vibrant SEVAS year"? For me it's a challenge. Marsha did all the heavy SEVAS lifting this summer. I basically filled the bird feeders. How can I jump-start the enthusiasm required to make a contribution this year? Is this a relevant question for you as well?

Some thoughts are:

#1 Always the joy of seeing you all once again. Your smiles and support keep my SEVAS engine roaring. We are an inspiring group and there is much to be excited about this year. Trish Wheeler, our new Program chair has already assembled a great roster of monthly meeting speakers.

#2 Checking out our lasting imprint. This is another energizing effort for me. Our demonstration gardens, the Purple Martin Project, presenting to the kids at Babe James Center, our friends at MDC, MSC, and other partners, Tuesday Morning Birders, Birds and Brew, general meetings, etc.

My point is, let's start gearing up before we arrive. There is still much work to be done, for the birds, the natural world, and our environment. The call for involvement seems even more urgent than ever.

HOW CAN WE CONTRIBUTE FOR THE GREATER GOOD even if leaving is difficult.

Once again, Thanks for your support!

See you soon! Bill

Bill & Marsha Cox
president.sevas@gmail.com



Mosquito Lagoon
 photo: liz payne merideth

Save the Dates

2023-24 at a glance

Monthly Meetings

Mark your calendars now!

October - April, SEVAS meets on the second Thursday of each month. Marine Discovery Center, NSB, 7pm. We are always honored to have speakers who touch on myriad topics close to our hearts. More specifics soon!

Oct 12: Christie Miller, Lyonia Environmental Center

Nov 9: Carolyn Kovacs, Florida Sea Grant


Dec 14: Trey Hannah, Marine Discovery Center

Jan 11: Michael Brothers, Birding expert

Feb 8: Jessy Wayles, Indian River Lagoon Nat'l Estuary

Mar 14: Brittany Piersma, Audubon West Everglades

Apr 11: Donna Althearn, Volusia beekeeper



Audubon Florida Assembly
October 26 - 28
Conservation in a Changing Landscape
 Speakers, field trips, learning sessions and more
 Sheraton Tampa Brandon Hotel
[more here](#)




Orange Audubon Society's 8th annual
North Shore Birding Festival
Nov 30 - Dec 4
[more here](#)



Annual Events

The birds need our help. Mark your calendars now!

SEVAS members participate in various counts and citizen science projects through the year. Service is fun together, so join a team--everyone is welcome and no experience is necessary.

Dec 14 - Jan 5: Audubon Christmas Bird Count, (CBC)

Since 1900, tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas brave snow, wind, rain, or sunshine to collect data used to assess populations, and guide conservation action.

Early February: FL Shorebird Alliance Winter Shorebird

Survey, (WSS) The FSA is a statewide network of local partnerships committed to advancing shorebird and seabird conservation. The Winter survey helps to identify key wintering sites to guide future conservation efforts, and recognize long-term trends in population and distribution.

Feb 16 - 19: Audubon Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC)

Since 1998, every February this worldwide event gets thousands to count as many birds as they can find in their favorite areas, to help expand our understanding of birds. Participants are asked to count for at least 15 minutes (or longer) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings online.

Cattle Egret
 photo: judy callagher



SEVAS in the Field

Stay up to date!

Check our [Facebook](#) and [MeetUp](#) pages for changes, additions, or cancellations.

TUESDAY MORNING BIRDERS

TMB walks are essentially leaderless, but several experienced birders are always available to help. Meet at the site at 8am and plan to spend about two hours:

October 10: Marine Discovery Center, NSB

October 17: Indian River Lagoon Park, NSB

October 24: Dunlawton Sugar Mill Gardens, Port Orange

October 31: Eldora House Trail, Canaveral NS

BIRDS & BREWS

Third Thursday of the month. B&B walks provide an end of day birding jaunt and a libation of choice at a local pub or restaurant. We bird different sites, and enjoy time to connect afterwards.

October 19 4pm: Spruce Creek Preserve, NSB

Park and meet at the end of Creek Shore Trail. We'll gather and bird, and afterwards head over to Hidden Lakes Golf Club for a pint and nosh. Note: There is a Volusia County park entrance fee or pass required (unless you're on a bike).

November 16 4pm: Sugar Mill ruins, 600 Old Mission Rd, NSB

Afterward birding, we'll gather for libations at the Riverdeck on Riverside Dr in NSB.

SEVAS birding events are free and open to all. Some locations require an entrance fee, but most do not.

FIELD TRIPS

SEVAS field trips are longer outings to further out areas. Overnights will have additional costs. We usually meet locally to carpool. Stay tuned!

December TBD: Merritt Island NWR, Black Point Drive

January 13 630am: Lake Apopka

February 17 7am: Merritt Island NWR, Black Point Drive

March 3 630am: Orlando Wetlands

March 16 7am: Lake Apopka

April 4-6: South Florida Overnight

Amazon Wish List

We now have an **Amazon "wish list"** of needed items if you'd like to contribute.

Right now, we need to update and stabilize our table for community outreach events, so items include table cloths, hangers for our posters, and wind weights to secure our tent. We'll add items as we need, so check our Wish List often! We appreciate you!

FYI, we "table" regularly, and invite you to join us. Basically, "tabling" is setting up a SEVAS table at a high traffic community event to raise awareness of our mission, and gain support for our projects and activities. We attract people, raise money, advocate for the birds and their habitat, and make connections. If you'd like be part of the fun, please email president.sevas@gmail.com for more info.

The BirdWord Puzzle

Robert Merideth

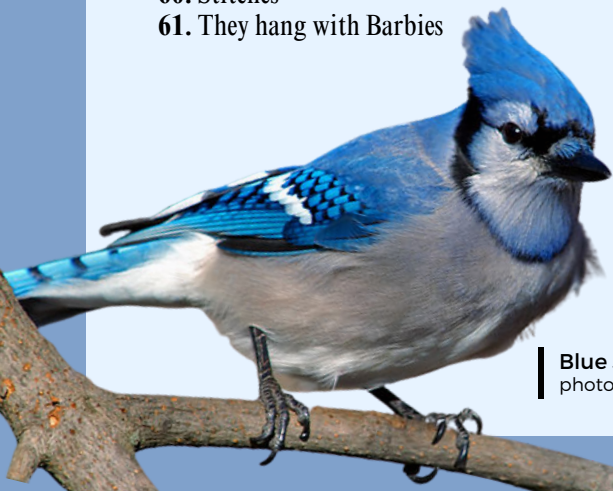
"Minor League Birds at Bat"

**theme word clues

answers can be found [online here](#)

Across

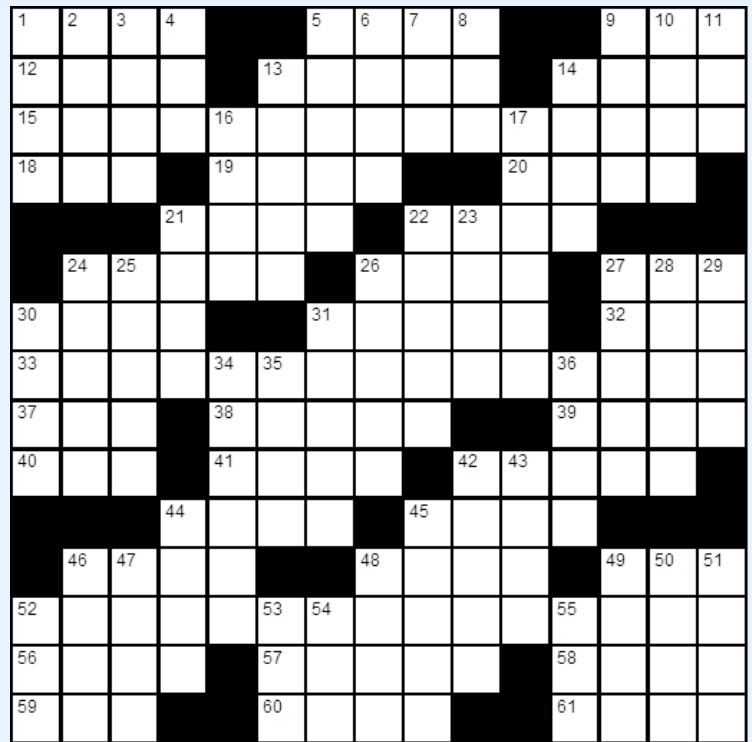
1. Lesser Black-backed Gull (alpha code)
5. Old ____
9. Hit the slopes
12. ____ vera
13. Insect-eating songbird
14. Impressed
15. **St. Pete area noisy mobbers
18. Japanese currency
19. Glossy or White are types
20. Places for experiments
21. Hawaiian strings
22. Magnificent Frigatebird (alpha code)
24. Spaces on birds' faces
26. Lapland Longspur (alpha code)
27. Combat
30. Autumn bloomers
31. Scarlet or Hyacinth, e.g.
32. A Beatle spouse
33. **Divers in Midwest "big waters"
37. Victory
38. Tortoise racers?
39. One's turn in a game
40. Commercials
41. British naval and Arctic explorer for whom a small gull of that region is named
42. Heavy-duty carts
44. "Quiet!"
45. Birder's field call
46. A Western phoebe
48. Food storage pouch for birds
49. Greek letter
52. **Blues City marsh nesters
56. Lake surrounding Point Pelee and Presque Isle
57. "Good things come to ____ that wait!"
58. Reddish Egret (alpha code)
59. Day following Mardi Gras (abbr.)
60. Stitches
61. They hang with Barbies



Blue Jay
photo: rob hanson

"We still do not know one thousandth of one percent of what nature has revealed to us."

Albert Einstein



©Robert Merideth

Down

1. Disney dog
2. Type of grosbeak
3. Home of Convention on Migratory Species secretariat
4. "Holy cowbird!"
5. The end (Fr.)
6. Spheres
7. Salon goo
8. "____ rang?"
9. "Sailor, ____ the deck!"
10. Largo and West
11. Driver's lic. and others
13. "This place has good ____!"
14. Opened slightly
16. Water barrier
17. Small Strigiformes that nests in cactus cavities
21. Constellation animal
22. Medieval clubs
23. "C'est la vie!"
24. Shocking
25. Forebodings
26. Limnologists study them
27. "____ Bully" (1965 hit)
28. Males of this Western hummingbird show rose-red crowns
29. Optimistic
30. MacGillivray's Warbler (alpha code)
31. One of the wrens
34. Gray-cheeked or Clay-colored, e.g.
35. Mekong River land
36. Large, brilliantly colored fish
42. Part of LED
43. Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, briefly
44. Hoopla
45. Newspapers
46. Arid
47. In the thick of
48. Northwestern or Tamaulipas, for example
49. Type of swallow
50. Mideast's Gulf of ____
51. Fed. mapping agency
52. ____ Gull (now split as Common and Short-billed)
53. The "I" of T.G.I.F.
54. "____ Loves You" (yeah, yeah, yeah!)
55. Annoy

Vagrants: Pioneers or Sirens? by Marsha Cox (from page 1)

thought that was that. But summer storms have had birds appearing in more unfamiliar places. Flamingos seen in Kansas and on the shores of Lake Michigan?! Apparently, they were caught by Hurricane Idalia while crossing the Caribbean and deposited way out of their usual range. They sure brought lots of "buzz" to the local birders, but, how will this displacement stress affect their survival? What may happen in this unusual habitat as winter comes? Will their instincts have them heading south? Are they in need of rescue or will "nature take its course"?

So, maybe this isn't an article only on the vagrant bird. Maybe it's to raise an alarm that when bird populations are already in decline from a variety of factors here is another threat. Our storms are getting stronger and these early autumn storms have an effect on migration patterns. Climate models show that there will be an increase in strong storms in the Atlantic as ocean temperatures rise. Such storms create a grave danger.



Canada Warbler
photo: wildreturn



Blackburnian Warbler
photo: paul hurtado

The **New York Times report** cites the rare sightings of North American birds in the British Isles, courtesy Hurricane Lee, most likely the biggest such influx ever seen. A Canada Warbler was sighted in Britain, a Blackburnian Warbler in Ireland for the first time! In fact, sixteen species, warblers, vireos, Baltimore Orioles and Cliff Swallows were reported, apparently blown far off their respective migratory courses. Again, exciting times for British twitchers.

But what of the birds? They are out of their habitat. Can they find the right food to survive? If they are able to fly south to warmer climates will their instincts bring them there? And then what? They face new terrain, uncommon predators, different diseases.

As I finish this piece, I realize that I too have "veered off course" a bit. But while thinking about it I realize that what we do at SEVAS to live out our mission of "protecting birds and their habitat" is more important than ever. Please recruit a friend and help us live out our mission actively.



Northern Gannet
photo: jacme31

Purple Martin Project by Richard Fasse (from page 1)

have nest building start in January. At this point we will need volunteers to stop by regularly so we can get an accurate estimate of when we need to drop the gourd system to begin the look for eggs. We monitor and submit accurate data on when each egg was laid, hatched, and fledged to participate in the national **Project MartinWatch**. Click that link for more information about the program- we'd love to have you join us!

Eggs usually come a week or two after we observe nesting behavior. If you want to volunteer just join us for the gourd raising right after New Years. Details will be forthcoming.



Volunteer with SEVAS!

Got Action? Monthly speakers? Birding field trips? Environmental projects? Become part of our community.

We make a tangible difference in Volusia County...We love to support our birds and elevate our local habitat...We offer free and fun events to the public...We use our skills and talents for good... We meet and network with like-minded in our community... We educate and nurture future generations...

ORGANIZER? Program Planner

LOVE KIDS? Educational activities

TECHIE? Webmaster

LEADER? Vice President

GREEN THUMB? P4B Gardener

EYES? Purple Martin Nest Observer



Sand Fiddler crab
photo: geoff gallice

Bird of the Month

Liz Payne Merideth, Local scope photos by John Kendall

"There they are!" Shearwaters are hard to see and extra patience may be required, but pelagic birds are fascinating. These seabirds are adapted to life on the open ocean and spend most of their lives at sea, so they are mainly seen far from land.

Florida's Atlantic coast is a hotspot for pelagic birding due to its proximity to the warmer Gulf Stream that can bring a variety of seabirds closer to shore. Here we encounter petrels, gannets and shearwaters. Heading out on a boating tour is the best way to see these magnificent birds, but thanks to John Kendall, we have photos of his recent Cape Canaveral NS finds. Shears are members of the tubenose family-- their nostrils are in the form of two tubes on the top of their upper bill. They can dive and use their wings to "fly" underwater in search of small fish, squid, and other marine creatures.

- Cory's Shearwater** A medium-sized bird, most commonly observed now. Seen often gliding low over the water. Recognized by brownish plumage and white underparts. Cory's breed in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic.
- Great Shearwater** A larger bird with a dark cap and upperparts that contrast with a white neck collar and white band at their tail base. Greats breed on only four small islands in the South Atlantic from September to May.
- Sooty Shearwater** A darker bird with a slightly forked tail, Sootys are not often close to land. They migrate up to 40,000 miles a year, winning them the longest migration ever recorded electronically of any animal on Earth.

Cory's Shearwater
photo: hobbyfotowiki



Cory's Shearwater photos: john kendall
Limited Atlantic (vs. Pacific) population, usually seen more often in spring here. Wingspan 35-39"



Great Shearwater photos: john kendall
Here's one actually flying by. Found regularly, but are being seen more this week-- many are resting and found moribund. Wingspan 39-47"



Sooty Shearwater photos: john kendall
Limited Atlantic (vs. Pacific) population. More often seen here in Spring. Wingspan 37-43"

BECOME A MEMBER TODAY

Yes!

I would like to protect and conserve habitat and wildlife in Volusia County!

Annual Memberships benefit you, the birds and our shared environments.

Join here, or securely ONLINE at sevolusiaaudubon.org.

Single \$20 Family \$25

Complete this form, make your check out to **SEVAS**, and mail to:

Southeast Volusia Audubon Society
PO Box 46 New Smyrna Beach, FL 32170

Scan this code!



Your membership includes our digital newsletter, The Skimmer, October to April, as well as member emails with announcements and event reminders.

First Name _____ Last Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Year-round resident Snowbird Volunteer I'd like to add an additional contribution \$ _____

Got Skimmers?
Merritt Island NWR