



The eSkimmer

Southeast Volusia Audubon Society, Inc. Summer Email Issue Vol. I - No. 4 August, 2006

The Southeast Volusia Audubon Society promotes the protection of birds, other wildlife and their habitat through education and activism.

Wandering Members

Ken Gunn Reports

Belugaing

My wife, Beth, is a whale freak so I continuously look for opportunities to take her whale watching. Earlier this year, I read that Churchill, Manitoba (the polar bear capital of the world), on Canada's Hudson Bay, is a prime area for Beluga Whales. We arranged to visit there in early July.

The area is not accessible by road so we took a train for two nights and one day north from Winnipeg, Manitoba. During the day we were on the north side of Lake Winnipeg and the scenery was Boreal forest, wetlands and some farmland. Unfortunately there was no birdlife near the tracks. There were, however, numerous deer and wild elk which kept our interest up.

We arrived in Churchill, only a few hours late, near midday on Saturday, July 8. We immediately joined another couple and hired a taxi for a 2 hour overview of the area. There are only 60 miles of road – passable and impassable – in the community. We covered most of them at 60+ miles per hour in a van with no shocks. We passed the inlet where, as the locals say, it seemed that you could walk to the other side, a mile or more away, on the backs of the whales and never get your feet wet. What a sight! There are some three to four thousand white Beluga Whales in the inlet itself and another 30,000 in the entire Hudson Bay.

We continued on and lo and behold, our co-riders sighted a bear on the shore. We circled around a bit and got within about 3/4 of a mile of him. Another great experience; we watched him for half an hour! It was the only bear we saw and almost the only one seen while we were there. We got off at the "Eskimo Museum" when we got back to town and saw a stuffed polar bear, musk ox and walrus. The bear is very nearly as large as the musk ox; truly a magnificent beast.

The next day, we went kayaking with the whales in the inlet. The water was a little rough, and hence kind of muddy, so we couldn't see the whales feeding, as some friends from the train had the day before, but it was exciting to be within a few feet of these massive creatures.

Incidentally, Belugas are born almost black, and there were several young in the inlet, turn gray as they age and

Meetings

Meetings are held the 1st Wednesdays
Oct. thru March

Edgewater library 103 Indian River Blvd. 7: P.M.
Smoke-free environment. Refreshments are served.
Plenty of parking. Public welcome.

Next meeting is October 4, 2006

Officers & Chairs



President: Don Picard	321-206-4658	sevas@cfl.rr.com
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Ways & Means: Vacant		
Education/Outreach: Vacant		

Conservation Notes

In the words of a great old song, “When will they ever learn?” I wonder what it will take to get Floridians as concerned about global heating as they are about health care, Iraq and insurance costs. Much has happened recently that just might push people into action.



Record heat, 150 people and thousands of milk cows dying in California, storms and deadly floods, blistering droughts, Greenland melting accelerating and much, much more. Are people smart enough to put all that together and realize that Mother Earth is getting really angry because we keep turning up her thermostat?

For some time I had hoped that 105 degree F weather would hit DC while congress was in session and some realization of the climate crisis might even penetrate the White House. Too late, congress has gone home to prepare for reelection. The White House and other administration members are too busy scratching their heads over the Israel-Lebanon mess to have any time for an annoying thing like the pending collapse of civilization.

Is that too strong a description, ‘the pending collapse of civilization’? Maybe, but a bunch of scientists are beginning to say it out loud. Even the Pentagon wrote a paper on it. Pessimists say that global heating, and especially melting near the poles, has already become irreversible and Florida will eventually disappear under the waves. Optimists such as Dr. James Hansen of NASA say we have about ten years in which to get off our duffs and really start cutting greenhouse gas emissions to avoid catastrophe.

I met Jim Hansen in 1992 at a global warming conference in Tallahassee. All the presidential candidates attended by big screen TV satellite hookup, except George H. W. Bush and Pat Buchanan who declined. Hansen was a luncheon speaker, and I asked him for copies of some of his charts showing calculations of radiant energy striking the earth and the percentage reflected by various amounts of greenhouse gases etc. He kindly mailed copies, which I still have – somewhere. Jim had testified before Congress in 1988 (the hottest year until 2005) that his computer models showed with 90 percent probability that global warming was underway. Many of his colleagues thought he was rushing his conclusions.

When Pinatubo erupted in 1991, Hansen used his climate models to calculate precisely how much the volcanic dust and aerosols would cool the planet and when global warming would resume. His forecast proved to be exactly correct. Hansen risks his job by continuing to speak out, despite administration attempts to censor him.

In that 1992 conference, the other luncheon speaker was Sen. Al Gore, who was not then a candidate because his son was still in a coma, following an accident. Gore’s talk was much like his new movie, except that he used cardboard charts instead of big screen images.

I was a minor panelist in the conference and got an award for citizen activism (the only award given). The keepsake was a little model planet which changed like the seasons when you

shook it. In accepting the award, I remarked that the model no doubt depicted the planet we would have to move to when global warming destroyed this one. That got laughter and applause.

What have I accomplished since then? Doggone little and not nearly enough. Writing and talking about global warming has been as futile as shouting in an empty field. Well the legislature did enact some modest support for solar, so maybe things are changing. All of us had better hope so.

My little model planet has dried up and doesn’t change like the seasons anymore. Is that an omen?

—Lee Bidgood

Butterfly Festival

Sounds like a good field trip idea . . .

The Florida Museum of Natural History, home of the award-winning Butterfly Rainforest exhibit, will be the host of the inaugural Florida Butterfly Festival October 14-15, 2006. Enjoy this destination festival which will feature lectures by world-renowned naturalists, expertly guided field trips, specialty vendors and a photography contest.

While enjoying the weekend festivities, take advantage of the cultural and natural beauties of Alachua County located in the heart of North Central Florida. For more information visit www.flmnh.ufl.edu/butterflyfest or call (352) 846-2000 ext. 200.

We believe that this festival will be a wonderful experience for the members of the Southeast Volusia Audubon Society.

Please let me know if you are interested and if you have any questions. We look forward to hearing from you. Please reply to butterflyfest@flmnh.ufl.edu

Links

News on the internet

A big advantage of the eSkimmer is that we can link you up instantly to sites of interest.

We’ll try to include those we feel are pertinent to our members and readers. Feel free to send us your suggestions.

www.audubonofflorida.org

<http://www.audubon.org/>

<http://www.planetark.com/>

Belugaing from page 1

become pure white at about age 3 or 4. I also saw 2 of the 3 species of Jaeger in the area. They were busy chasing gulls and terns, in incredible and lengthy acrobatic flying displays, to steal their food.

The next day, I birded for some 5 hours with a thirty-year local. Saw just over 40 species, including the third Jaeger species and 3 other lifers but no ptarmigan – a disappointment. I did see, separately, three American Golden Plover in full breeding plumage. One had close to a dozen chicks running around on the tundra. Later in the day we went back out into the inlet in an 18-foot motor boat. Another great experience! Whales all over the place! The Belugas are the only whales which can turn their heads and they looked us over very well. They would eyeball us from the back, then the side, and finally they would swim under the boat, turning over onto their backs to look straight up at us. Wow!

We spent the next couple of days scouting the old fort and learning history.

Churchill was one of the original English forts in northern North America, was one of the Hudson Bay Company's two outlets for furs and was the port of entry, so to speak, for some of the early white settlers in Central Canada.

Bears wander into Churchill regularly so they tranquilize them, or trap and tranquilize them, measure, tag, etc.; then haul them to this facility where they keep them in the dark for about a month without food (they normally don't eat in the summer/fall anyway and often go into what's called "walking hibernation"); tranquilize them again and fly them south to the area where the ice first forms, and where they were trying to get to in the first place; and turn them loose. It doesn't work!

They catch the same bears in town year after year.

Incidentally, the jail was empty now as it is early in the year.

We flew back to Winnipeg on a twin-engine job on Thursday, July 13. Arrived 1 hour late on a 2 hour flight due to headwinds and lack of power but we had a wonderful trip and will return to see the bears one year very soon.

—Ken

Follow this link and see Ken's pictures (2) of the Polar Bear Compound.

<http://preview.saudubonsociety.photosite.com/Album1/>

The Bird Rescue Center

THE BIRD RESCUE CENTER, has done an outstanding job of rescuing, rehabilitating and releasing sick, injured and orphaned birds. It is staffed entirely by volunteers.

Needless to say, they can always use your help. They'll train you to the job of your choice and you'll find the experience rewarding.

Call Phyllis Lamborn - 423-1434

Native & Nice

Butterfly Milkweed *Asclepias tuberosa*

There are more than 20 species of milkweeds native to Florida. According to native plant experts, two species are best-known. However, I have never seen the swamp milkplant (*Asclepias perennis*), which is smaller; prefers moist, shady spots; and produces white flowers.

It's the butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) that I know. It is more common and grows freely throughout all of Florida. Its flowers form bright, showy clusters in reddish orange, orange, or yellow atop 2-foot stems. As its name implies, butterfly milkweed is very attractive to butterflies—especially Monarchs and Queens. Monarch larva feed on milkweed exclusively and their look-alike, Queen caterpillars, feed on milkweed almost exclusively.

Ideally suited to well-drained sandy soil, butterfly milkweed thrives in full sun. After flowering, it produces the familiar pointed, elongated pod that turns from green to brown as the seeds mature. Keep an eye on those brown pods. As they dry, they will pop open and you will see black seeds attached to downy white fluff. Mother Nature's agent, the wind, will scatter the seeds to be propagated far and wide. Or you can remove the seeds and carefully separate them from the fluff to start seedlings.

Fill a few pots with potting soil and soak it thoroughly. Place 3 or 4 seeds in each pot and cover with ¼ " of soil. As the soil dries, water from the bottom until seedlings are 2-3 inches tall and ready to plant in the ground.

—Donnadine Miller

Florida Audubon

A letter from Rob Heath Re: *Banded Spoonbill Sightings*

I have been getting some good reported observations from the participants, but we need more eyes out there right now. I just spent the morning checking out a site near Brooksville, and found two banded fledglings in a group of nine. The most interesting fact was that each bird was from a different one of the two colonies where we banded this year. These guys could turn up anywhere right now, and that's the kind of data we really need.

Link up here for more information:

http://www.audubonofflorida.org/who_tavernier_spoonbills.html

Please forward this  to friends.