



The eSkimmer

Southeast Volusia Audubon Society, Inc.

Issue Vol. V- No. 2

February, 2010

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

Prez Sez

Restoration and Farmton are both on the agenda again. On Jan 25th, the Edgewater City Council voted five to zero on first reading to let the Restoration project go ahead. On February 5th, the final reading and vote will have been conducted. As you may recall, Restoration will have 8,500 residences and more than 3.3 million square feet of commercial and industrial uses. The state Department of Community Affairs denied the project some time ago and the developer and the city would normally have gone to an administrative hearing process to overturn the DCA objection. Instead, they chose to negotiate with the DCA to gain its approval.

As a result of an agreement between the city, the developer and DCA, changes were made to the plan that make it more palatable to the DCA. In it, the developer must delete the Conservation hamlet that would have put people and bears in conflict because of its proposed location. The developer must record conservation easements for at least three-quarters of the 5,187-acre property before any building could commence. The agreement provides for greater protection of wetlands, and requires the developer to remove the cultivated pines and restore the area to natural pine flatwood communities. It also requires the use of "green" building standards for all buildings in the Restoration development. Further, it requires the use of xeriscaping on lawns instead of water-dependent grass such as St. Augustine.

They will be allowed to build a portion of residential homes and then do some commercial buildings. A certain proportion of jobs will be required at certain stages of development, and the developer must bear the costs associated with infrastructure so as not to impact the taxes of current residents of Edgewater. To mitigate the urban sprawl and lack of need arguments, the city will not be allowed to annex any more property into its boundary or permit any other large developments until 2017.

I confirmed at the February 8th city council meeting that all these actions are part of the agreement. Based on all these changes mandated by the DCA, I polled the executive committee and they unanimously agreed that the club should withdraw its objection to the Restoration development. We agreed that our consistent objections

See **Prez Sez** p.3

Meetings

Meetings are held the 3rd Wednesdays
Sept. thru March at 7 P.M.

Edgewater Library 103 Indian River Blvd. 7 p.m.
*Smoke-free environment. Refreshments are served.
Plenty of parking. Public welcome.*

Next meeting is Feb. 17, 2010

Speaker: **Dr. Michael Reiter**

Associate Professor of Environmental Science and Chair of the Department
of Integrated Environmental Science at Bethune-Cookman University

See February Speaker page 5

Topic: Global Climate Change: What Can We Do About
It? or, *How Big a Hole Do I Need to Jump Into?*

Programs & Field trips subject to change.

Field Trips

Meet in the Market Square parking lot Edgewater,
Ridgewood Ave. & 442 between Dunkin Donuts & Chik-Fil-A.
(Meeting time listed with trip)

Bring lunch & drinks. Don't forget bug-spray!

Sat., Feb. 20 - Orlando Wetlands Park 7 a.m. (3)

http://www.sevolusiaaudubon.org/field_trips.htm

Questions? Contact Gail Domroski 386-428-0447

Numbers in parentheses indicate degree of difficulty.
(1) easy or no walking. (2) walking less than one mile.
(3) One plus mile walking and/or uneven terrain.

Field Trips are free.

Audubon members and guests are all welcome.

Because we don't think about future
generations, they will never forget us.

~Henrik Tikkanen

Please forward this **eSkimmer** to friends.

Conservation Notes

Will We Ever Learn?

Developers, builders and Chambers of Commerce have decided that ending this 'Great Recession' requires building more and more houses, stores and condos. Never mind that Florida has an enormous surplus of empty or soon to be vacated buildings of all types. "If we build it, they will come" remains Florida's unofficial motto.

I read that Volusia County is still considering whether to permit the huge Farmton development straddling the Volusia-Brevard county line. It is encouraging that the SE Volusia and Halifax Audubon chapters have steadfastly opposed this giant project. Unfortunately Audubon of Florida and West Volusia Audubon have succumbed to the Miami Corporation's blandishments and condone the Farmton plan.

There are more than enough new projects either permitted or being considered that would damage our sole source aquifer, fill wetlands and eliminate critical wildlife habitat. Overloaded roads, schools and hospitals would become even more overcrowded and underfunded.

Typical is "Restoration", a project just west of Edgewater. The developer, Hammock Creek Green, LLC donated between \$25,000 and \$49,999 to Audubon of Florida in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2009. Other notable donators were the FPL Group Foundation and the St. Joe Co. for between \$50,000 and \$99,999 each.

Here in Gainesville, some of us oppose Progress Energy's proposed \$17 billion nuclear power plant in nearby Levy County that would wipe out 765 acres of wetlands. It would be perched over a portion of our Sole Source Floridan Aquifer in Karst (porous limestone) terrain where the aquifer is at or near the surface in a flood-prone region. Nuclear plants are water hogs. Levy County talks only about jobs, jobs, jobs that the plant could bring.

I am disappointed that Audubon of Florida so far hasn't seemed concerned about this nuclear project's impact on wetlands, wildlife and water. When I was active in Volusia and neighboring counties, we used to fight hard to save even a dozen or so wetland acres. Why no agency has vetoed destruction of 765 wetland acres is difficult to understand.

Florida Progress, FPL, Mosaic Fertilizer, Royal Caribbean International and Plum Creek Timber sponsored Audubon of Florida's 2009 Audubon Assembly. Plum Creek Timber is the largest US private landowner. It owns some 7,800,000 acres of timberland originally belonging to the Burlington Northern Railroad. Recently the company has developed luxury golf courses and top priced housing deep in some of its forests – arousing the wrath of environmentalists.



Does Plum Creek own or plan to acquire Florida land?

I hope that AoF can deal objectively with projects proposed by some of its major contributors and sponsors.

Our former democracy seems to be drifting toward an oligarchy, if we aren't already there. The oil-igarchy is a major component of an oligarchy government by the wealthy and powerful few. Unless we vote, we shouldn't complain. Many Floridians don't bother to vote. The Supreme Court in its supreme wisdom has decided that a corporation is really a person and has removed the former partial limit on corporate purchases of politicians.

Should we blame banks, other financial institutions, politicians or greedy property buyers and condo flippers for causing the current recession?

In 1926 something happened in South Florida that has an eerie similarity to recent events and what may happen again. It was land boom times for the Miami environs in 1926. A famous railroad baron recommended that whenever the train stopped in South Florida, you should throw your hat and wherever it landed, buy the land. On every corner in Miami, "Binder Boys" were selling contracts for land purchases. Sometimes a contract would be resold several times in one day. Banks happily financed those purchases.

The South Florida land boom bubble burst when the railroad was unable to deliver enough building materials to keep up with demand and a shipwreck blocked the harbor ingress. Landowners couldn't make payments and the banks went belly up. That preceded the 1929 stock market crash. You know the rest.

Some good news: Our governor has recommended funding Florida Forever, despite the state's cash shortage; Gainesville Regional Utilities has sold out its Feed-in-Tariff (FIT) funding solar PV through 2017; First steps in Everglades restoration are underway; Amendment 4, by Florida Hometown Democracy will be on the ballot this fall mandating voter approval for land use changes in local Comprehensive Plans. Developers, builders and Chambers of Commerce deplore amendment 4.

—Lee Bidgood

Opinions expressed above are the writer's and not necessarily those of Southeast Volusia Audubon. -L.B.

Lee Bidgood is Conservation Chair, emeritus. He writes from Gainesville, FL.

So bleak is the picture... that the bulldozer and not the atomic bomb may turn out to be the most destructive invention of the 20th century.

~Philip Shabecoff, *New York Times Magazine*, 4 June 1978

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and letters to city, county and DCA officials (along with those of other groups such as ECARD) won the day. Although we have personal objections to adding 18,000 more people to the city of Edgewater in a single development, the environmental objections have been substantially satisfied.

Farmton is a different story. Whereas Restoration was subjected to the rigorous process of Development of Regional Impact (DRI), Farmton wants to change city and county comp plans based on a "fifty year vision". It will be taken up again at the Volusia County Council on the 10th of February.

—Don Picard

Birds

PAINTED BUNTING — BIRD WITHOUT EQUAL

The Painted Bunting's French name is "nonpareil," which means without an equal. This small colorful finch is a native song bird. The male takes two years to become the most spectacularly colored of all North American song birds. Its beautiful colors, dark blue head, green back, red rump and under parts make it easy to identify. The plumage of the female and juvenile is greenish/yellow serving as great camouflage for these shy, secretive birds.

Painted Buntings have two distinct breeding populations: one found along the Atlantic Coast from North Carolina south to central Florida and another that stretches across much of Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas and Southward into northern Mexico. The Audubon Important Birding Area (IBA) Program has identified a number of sites that provide breeding habitat for painted Buntings, including North Carolina's Bald Head/Smith Island IBA, which supports 35-40 breeding pairs, and Florida's Fort George and Talbot Islands IBA, where 78 singing males were detected and over 100 birds were banded in 2000. The eastern population of Painted Bunting winters in southern Florida and probably in the northwestern Caribbean, while the western population winters in southern Mexico and central America.

The Painted Bunting favors open brush land, grassy areas, scattered woodlands, hedgerows and shrubby edges of coastal hammocks. They will come to feeders for seed. Areas with wetlands and marshes nearby are extremely valuable habitat for the Painted Bunting. Its diet consists mostly of seeds and insects, with insects predominant during the breeding season. These birds forage mostly on the ground or in low brush using a variety of foraging methods. They can fly up from the ground to grab tall grass stems in bill, pull stems to ground, and extract the seeds. They also pick insects from spider webs.

Breeding takes place in Atlantic coastal areas from northern Brevard County, Florida to North Carolina. Painted Buntings lay 3-4 eggs in a neatly woven deep cup

nest, usually in a brush or vine tangle 3 to 6 feet high or rarely up to 23 to 26 feet in Spanish moss.

The Painted Bunting is one of the most rapidly declining song birds in the eastern United States. The exact causes for this decline are not known, but are believed to include habitat loss, Cowbird parasitism and trapping for the exotic pet trade while the bunting is on its wintering grounds in the Caribbean.

A cooperative program entitled the Southeastern Atlantic Painted Bunting Conservation Initiative (SAPABUCI) was formed in 2001 to address the research and management needs of painted Bunting populations in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. State and federal biologists and managers, non-governmental organization managers, and interested citizens are cooperating in planning future research of the bunting that will benefit the recovery of it's population.

— Gail Domroski

References:

Meyers, J.M. 2004. Bird without an equal: the story of Georgia's Painted Bunting. USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, Maryland, USA. <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/pabu>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Painted_bunting (follow this link for images of Painted Bunting)

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

2010 Winter Shorebird Survey

SEVAS was invited, by the Volusia Environmental Section, to assist in the Florida section of the 2010 Winter Shorebird Survey. The object is to develop data for a better understanding of shorebirds all along the east coast. We spent some time planning so that our routes and system would be repeatable in future years, making comparisons more meaningful. Of particular interest were Snowy Plovers, Piping Plovers, Wilson's Plovers and Red Knots. Also particular attention was to be paid to any banded birds.

On February 5, 14 of our members and friends set off walking the Atlantic beach and boating the Intercoastal and surrounding wetlands and channels. Ken Park volunteered his boat for the northern portion of the Intercoastal and Don Picard supplied his boat for the south part of the Intercoastal and the wetland channels near JB's Fish Camp. (Actually, Don did his part of the survey on February 4 due to an ominous weather forecast.)

In total, we counted 58 species and 4525 birds, a terrific total. On the downside, the only target birds counted were 5 Red Knots by Nancy White and Marsha Cox. The only banded birds were a Sandwich Tern and 2 Royal Terns observed by Ken Gunn & Tad Fyock a couple of hours before the official count time began.

Thanks to everyone who participated.

pix : <http://sevolusiaaudubon.org>

—Ken Gunn

Impacts of Wind Power Generation on Birds

With the rapid rise of the commercial wind power industry, many bird conservation advocates are concerned about potential detrimental impacts of commercial wind energy generation on bird populations in North America and worldwide. This concern is understandable, and it is rational. After all, commercial wind turbines look and function like giant cuisinarts in the sky, and they have proliferated rapidly across the landscapes of Europe and North America in recent decades, with continued growth projected for the future. Furthermore, birds and bats may be negatively impacted by collisions and near-collisions with wind turbines, and also through “displacement” effects if the installation of wind turbines in an area precludes birds from using an area of otherwise suitable habitat. However, a close look at the facts suggests that on balance, wind power does more to help bird populations than it does to hurt them.

As a scientist working on bird-wind issues, I am frequently asked by friends, family and colleagues for information about it. Invariably, the most surprising thing I can tell them is the national average rate of bird mortality at wind turbines: 4.27 birds per turbine per year. This fact is entirely uncontroversial, and comes from the National Academy of Science’s 2007 review of the environmental impacts of wind power. The next question I usually get is something like, “If it’s that low, why do people make a big deal about it?” I don’t entirely know the answer to this question, but I believe that part of it is that the bird-wind issue started out on the wrong foot in the US, with our first wind farm (Altamont Pass in Solano County, CA) experiencing a mortality rate approximately 50 times higher than this national average, and impacting such an ecologically sensitive, charismatic, iconic, and legally-protected species as the Golden Eagle. This example, as well as other instances of significant wind-wildlife impacts, such as habitat displacement effects in prairie- and shrubsteppe-dwelling grouse species, and collision and barotraumatic impacts of wind turbines on certain species of bats, highlight the need for continued research, regulation, and caution with respect to the impacts of commercial wind energy generation on wildlife in the United States.

However, just as it would be irrational for a weight loss dieter to cut carrots out of his or her diet on the basis that carrots contain calories, it is irrational for bird conservation advocates to oppose wind power on the basis that negative impacts exist, without considering these impacts in the proper context of today’s energy choices and the most important challenges for bird conservation. How does bird mortality from wind power stack up against the other leading threats to birds? If you took the current level of annual bird mortality from commercial wind farms and multiplied it by 20 to account for 20-fold wind power proliferation, it would still account for less than 1% of the total annual bird kill from cats in this country. Windows,

vehicles, pesticides, and powerlines each kill birds in approximately the same magnitude as cats. These figures are also not controversial. If bird conservation is your cause, you have much bigger fish to fry.

Ok, but we can’t generate electricity from cats. How do wind power impacts on birds stack up to those of other types of electricity generation? Nature and bird conservation groups are virtually unanimous in identifying climate change as the most significant current threat to birds. This unintentional alteration of the global ecosystem threatens not only birds, but also the very ecosystems on which we, and all birds, depend. The most significant contributor to anthropogenic climate change is fossil fuel combustion, which is how most electricity is generated in the US and worldwide. Because wind power presents an economically viable, currently available way to generate electricity without exacerbating climate change, it offers a potential solution to the biggest current problem in bird conservation.

If the impacts of wind power on birds are, in fact, so small, and the potential benefits from climate change amelioration so vital, one may wonder why it is that opposition to wind power development has arisen from the bird conservation community. Is it humankind’s natural resistance to change? Is it NIMBY-ism flying under the flag of bird conservation? Is it the tendency for scientific facts to get lost amidst swirling seas of heated rhetoric? Is it that a bird getting struck in mid-air by a piece of steel moving at over 200 miles per hour is a lot more concrete and dramatic than is the slow and steady destabilization of the Earth’s ecosystems? All of these factors may play a role. However, because of another powerful and renewable resource, the intelligence of bird-lovers, there is reason to believe that the truth of wind power’s net benefits to birds will ultimately prevail. After all, it has already resulted in the strong support of commercial wind power generation among most bird, and nature conservation groups worldwide.

—Caleb Gordon, Pandion Systems, Inc.

Dr. Caleb Gordon is a lifelong birder, conservation advocate and now a PhD ornithologist. He has specialized in migrant bird ecology, with published research in grassland sparrow ecology, bird conservation in Latin American coffee agroecosystems, and songbird migrant stopover ecology. He also compiled a Christmas Bird Count in the eastern Andes of Ecuador for the National Audubon Society.

He now works for Pandion, an environmental consulting company located in Gainesville, FL, which specializes in wind-wildlife interactions. Their clients include both government and industry, for whom they perform original biological research studies, as well as education and outreach services. Their wind-based projects are widespread across North and Central America, and they also do locally-based educational and conservation-related ecological work within Florida.

<http://www.pandionsystems.com>

February Speaker

Our February speaker will be **Dr. Michael Reiter**, Associate Professor of Environmental Science and Chair of the Department of Integrated Environmental Science at Bethune-Cookman University. He has titled his talk **Global Climate Change: What Can We Do About It? or, How Big a Hole Do I Need to Jump Into?**

When it comes to global climate change (GCC), the public often has a quandry to address: once the data has been analyzed, the models developed and run, the projections obtained, and the potentially unfortunate outcomes identified, what now? What can we really do about something as large as GCC? The answer is: probably quite a bit...if we have the will to try, we are smart about our approach, and we make a serious decision to start. Those are important conditions, because the target is moving and we need to keep it in sight in order to reach it. The good news, however, is that many of the choices we have would be beneficial regardless of the presence of GCC! This talk will discuss the moving target of GCC, problems and approaches we have on different spatial and temporal scales, some of the options we have to choose from, and some useful concepts to keep in mind when deciding how we will take on the task.

Dr. Reiter is a past President and Chair of the Advisory Board of the Interdisciplinary Environmental Association, and past Editor for the international journal *Interdisciplinary Environmental Review*. He has received grants from NOAA, the USDA, and The Nature Conservancy, and is also a member of the Ecological Society of America and the Union of Concerned Scientists. He has received university awards, has been nominated for regional awards for his research and has been invited to speak on his work in the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, and Africa.

Dr. Reiter has also received university and national awards for his teaching. He has developed service-learning relationships with several state parks and National Estuarine Research Reserves in Florida, Delaware, and Indiana to provide research opportunities and field courses for students and data for managers. He has also helped organize international field courses and related student opportunities in several other countries.

His primary focus involves the interdisciplinary study of ecological and environmental problems, including integrated resource management and interactions among the environment, technology, and human culture. He can also be found working on several topics in aquatic ecology. His goal is to emphasize the importance of making scientifically informed, broadly based decisions concerning present and future environmental concerns, and to help ensure that such scientifically informed individuals exist in the near future.

Dr. Reiter holds a B.S. in Biology from Muskingum College in Ohio, an M.S. in Biology from Kent State University in Ohio, and a Ph.D. in Environmental Sciences from the University of Virginia.

—Ken Gunn

Of Interest

Great Backyard Bird Count

<http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc>

When you sail on a boat you take with you the minimum of resources. You don't waste anything. You don't leave the light on; you don't leave a computer screen on... on land we take what we want

- Ellen MacArthur (round-the-world yachtswoman)

A complete listing of all field trips for this season 2009-2010 — may be found on our website: http://sevolusiaaudubon.org/field_trips.htm
Information is there including links to the destinations. Take a look. It's very thorough.

Please check out our website at <http://sevolusiaaudubon.org>

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