



The eSkimmer

Southeast Volusia Audubon Society, Inc.

Issue Vol. V- No. 1

January, 2010

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

Prez Sez

I hope everyone had a great holiday season and wish you all a happy and healthy 2010. It is the end of another year and the end of another decade. The environmental community has made some gains and suffered some losses, but that is life and we must forge ahead. I hope all of you subscribe to websites of national and local causes that inspire you and that you write your representatives in congress and other elected officials to express your preferences. They need to hear from you. There are many issues of local, state and national issues that need your attention, from climate change to air quality standards, from oil dependence to alternative energy, from development to habitat protection. Nothing is to be gained from the anonymous rants in the local papers. Spend a few minutes every month answering calls to action to decision-makers. If the elected representatives only hear from the monied interests, they will certainly vote in their favor.

This year we have another great line-up of programs and field trips. The next three speakers are all respected scientists and educators who will provide us with valuable insight into the nature of Florida and the challenges of climate change. Some of the field trips will be to places we have not previously visited. YOU ARE INVITED! That includes the readers of this newsletter that are not members of the club or of National Audubon. All of our meetings are OPEN TO THE PUBLIC. Come and BRING A FRIEND. Check out our website for details.

I hope you have noticed some changes to the website. Gil and I have been working to make it better. Some of the changes are cosmetic, and are a result of my self-study on newer techniques for building web pages. In the future, there will be some changes to make it more user-friendly. In addition, check out the "Of Interest" page. Gil is working to make it a better resource for our visitors. If you have any suggestions, please let us know.

The club, the website and the blog are for your benefit. Please make a New Year's resolution to help make them better by your suggestions and by bringing friends to the meetings and field trips.

—Don Picard

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 Jan. 20, 2010

Speaker: **Mr. Michael Brothers**

See January Speaker page 4

**Topic: A Land Born of the Sea:
The Natural History of Volusia County**

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., Jan 23 - Viera Wetlands 7 a.m. (1)

See In The Field p. 4

Also: A Complete listing w/ details on our website:

http://sevolusiaaudubon.org/field_trips.htm

Questions? Contact Gail Domroski 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.

We never know the worth of water till the well is dry.

~Thomas Fuller, Gnomologia, 1732

Please forward this eSkimmer to friends.

Wandering Members

PANAMA

In mid-November, Ken Gunn and I joined 10 other birders including members of Halifax Audubon, on a trip to Canopy Tower and Canopy Lodge in Panama. We spent the first three nights at the Tower on Semaphore Hill in the Soberania National Park. Originally built as a radar station for security of the Canal Zone, this unusual building is essentially a 4 story steel silo with a huge geodesic-dome shaped antenna on the roof, which offers a panoramic view of the canal and overlooks the canopy of the rainforest. Some of the most memorable sightings from the roof were a pair of roosting Keel-billed Toucan, and a Gray-headed Kite soaring past in the soft sunlight of early morning. Large windows on each story look out into the forest at different levels, offering views of Mantled Howler Monkeys and Geoffrey's Tamarinds in addition to dozens of colorful species of birds. The entrance to the building is surrounded by flowering vines and feeders constantly visited by at least five hummingbird species, including the White-necked Jacobin, a bird described by one of us as "wearing a tuxedo!"

During our three days at the Tower, we visited several ponds in the vicinity of the city of Gamboa, which appears to be where many American canal workers were housed in a subdivision which is now marketed as a "gated community." At the ponds we spotted several species of kingfishers, herons, and egrets; most notable among them being an immature Rufescent Tiger Heron and a Capped Heron with bluish-white wings, a body feathered in butter cream white, and beautiful bright blue skin from the base of the beak extending to the eye.

On the Pipeline Road, we visited an army ant swarm, during which a colony of these ferocious carnivores engulf and devour any living thing they come across. These events bring out dozens of species of antbirds, antpittas, antwrens, antshrikes (are you catching on?) as well as leaf-tossers and woodcreepers. It was enlightening to learn that the birds do NOT eat the ants; they eat the insects, lizards, frogs, and whatever else jumps up trying to escape *from* the ants. It was during this event that our excellent guide, Carlos Bethancourt, spotted a rarely seen bird deep in the woods. We followed as he excitedly worked his way up a hillside through mud and thorns to spend about 20 minutes tracking and observing a Rufous Vented Ground-Cuckoo, a large bird reminiscent of a Roadrunner with a long pheasant-like tail.

The midpoint of our trip included a stop at the Mina Flores Lock, where there is a wonderful museum and



Panama 2009

George Sibley

observation deck of the Panama Canal, where we were able to watch a ship pass through the locks. From there we continued on to the Canopy Lodge, about 2 hours west of the Tower. Built beside a clear running stream in an area contiguous to the protected area of the Cerro Gaital Natural Monument in El Valle de Anton, the Lodge is approached by crossing a footbridge over the creek, which leads to a large covered stone patio containing the dining room, library, and viewing lounge.

Five elevated platform feeders stationed on the lawn below the viewing area draws about a dozen species, including Rufous Motmot, Flame-rumped (also called Lemon-rumped) Tanagers and Crimson-backed Tanagers. Streamside gardens of Verbena, Heliconia and Erythrina attract several species of hummingbirds not seen at the Tower. The Sunday Market in the village of El Valle satisfied those who felt the urge to shop. For those who hungered for more adrenalin than that derived from standing 30 feet from a White Hawk perched in the rain, a "zip line" filled the need. A trip to the beach offered me my first dip in the Pacific Ocean and the sighting of a hummingbird endemic to that area only- the Veraguan Green-breasted mango.

The total species count for the group was 278, 14 of which were heard-only. We were told the total was so LOW because it was late in the migration season. One can expect to total more than 300 species in a good week at Canopy Tower, Canopy Lodge, and surrounding environs!

—Fern Murphy

Birds

Attwater's Prairie Chicken

All four of our grandkids were in Houston for the holidays this year so, of course, Beth and I were too. I managed to slip away with a friend, the Saturday before Christmas, to the Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR. It is only an hour out of Houston but I had never been there. The reserve is located just south and west of Sealy, Texas, and was started as a 3500 acre purchase in the 1960s to try to save the Attwater's Prairie Chicken. The acreage has now been increased to 10,500 acres and a second, small reserve has been established at Texas City, Texas. A program is also being established with ranchers to preserve original coastal prairie grasslands, and last spring the first Attwater's were released on ranchland under this program. Of the 10,500 acres at Attwater, less than 1000 are open to the public by a 5 mile driving trail and two 1 ½ mile hiking trails.

see **Birds** p. 3

Chirps from a Fledgling

Has the state finally stopped the Farmton plan? The News Journal of 12/28/09 seems to think that's the case. And we thought no one was listening!

Speaking of "listening". I sensed a strong Obama may have saved "The Copenhagen Accord". While not very enforceable and non-binding, it does appear to be significant and verifiable. Good start, can we keep the ball rolling?

On the local front I see the feds expect to begin the final phase of the Rose Bay clean-up. Since they (we) have already invested about 41 mil in this project it seems reasonable to believe it will see completion in 2010. The dredging might be an interesting activity if anyone knows a good viewing point.

Finally a New York Times article on water stated that tap water might be legal but also unhealthy. I checked the municipal water supplies for most of Volusia County and legally it appears we pass with flying colors. Whether or not that means it's "healthy" may require further review. But if we have laid to rest the Farmton project it's starting to taste better. Let's stay vigilant in 2010 as we seek quality over quantity.

—Bill Cox

Birds from p.2

The Attwater's Prairie Chicken is a smallish member of the Greater Prairie Chicken of the Great Plains. There numbers were down to about 60 members living in the wild by 1998. The objective of the Attwater's Prairie Chicken Recovery Plan is to reach a goal of 5000 birds in three geographically separate, viable populations. It was decided that the only hope of achieving this goal was a captive breeding program. The first chicks were hatched under the program in 1992 and chicks are now being raised for release at Texas A & M University and five area zoos.

Unfortunately, the program has not shown great improvement in the numbers as yet. It has accomplished the following:

- arrested the precipitous decline (8700 birds in 1937 to 60 in 1998),
- preserved in perpetuity significant coastal prairie grasslands, manages them through controlled burns and planned (bison and cattle) grazing, and is adding to them through selective partnerships with Texas Coastal Bend ranchers,
- established coordination and cooperation between governments, private interests and wildlife organizations,
 - increased public awareness of the bird, the environment and nature in general.

Many factors work against the success of the numbers game. Predators are a serious issue. Skunks, bobcats, opossums, raccoons, coyotes, snakes and raptors abound in the area. Less than fifty percent of the birds released survive to the next breeding season. Of the nests built, only thirty percent escape predators to produce hatchlings. Attrition on hatchlings is nearly one hundred percent. Reserve workers are working to control predators during breeding season and it is hoped that breakthroughs in that area will occur. Also, as the base number increases, the ratio of predator to bird will improve. We can only hope.

We did not see any chickens on our trip. It was the

wrong time of year and the wrong time of day. They have a festival and give tours in early April each year. We did have a good visit and saw about forty bird species for the day.

—Ken Gunn

Anhingas

After reading Marjory Stoneham Douglas 1947 book, *River of Grass*, particularly the chapter "Eleventh Hour," I put Everglades on my Bucket List. This December, Santa Claus saw that list. On the way from New Smyrna Beach, he stopped his sleigh at Sebring to pick up a Cornwall Canadian couple who also wished to experience a first-time birding in the Everglades.

A pleasant sunny 70° F Floridian day for a forty-minute ride on the tram with a guide who pointed out the Anhingas as they swam with only their heads and necks above the water. Fun to watch how Anhingas perch in trees, then use their long straight pointed bills to spear fish! Next, they spread their wings to dry, just as I had spotted them in my peripheral vision on my back swing as I teed up on the eighteenth hole at the Turnbull Bay Golf Course.

No bugs made that Everglades trip even pleasanter as we watched the dark Anhingas extend their heads and necks that identified them in flight, but formed an S shape when they perched. There were many adult males, glossy greenish black above and below with black and white streaking on their upper wings and backs. The females are browner; both have long, fan-shaped tails.

When we walked the Anhinga Trail, it was exciting to see the characteristic blue circling their eyes, part of their mating plumage. A group of females nested nearby, oblivious to the human paparazzi.

What a thrill for novice birders!

—Jackie Myers

Backyard Naturalist

Marty & Mandy, Pt. 2

A brief synopsis.

Last issue, if you recall, I went to bed and left two wild marmosets (small monkeys) loose in my apartment safely housed in the branches of a dead tree in the living room and separated from me by a tightly shut door. Now that I felt secure in my role as Dr. Doolittle I was about to stride into the room and take charge of my new wards. I would be firm but fair, a good leader, kind and understanding but unquestionably the head man.

While my mind was forming this composite ideal of leadership another thought came crashing through with the ice cold sting of water in the face. Why were the monkeys bathed in the sunlight? I had been touched by the sun in my bedroom because instead of drapes I had window shades which had been up. I distinctly remembered in another flash that the living room drapes were closed. They were always closed. Because of my aversion to gadgetry, they were simply hung on wooden poles and it was too much trouble to fool with them so they had remained closed since the day my friend Evelyn hung them.

Enough of this speculation. I squiggled my toes into position in my flip-flops, tightened my flannel bathrobe sash, opened the door fully and walked in. I had planned to stride in but decided instead to stroll in. I figured that a nonchalant attitude would be to my advantage. I would just pretend that this was like every other morning, That way the monkeys would see how things were done and fall right into the routine. Now realize that all this figuring and planning was taking place in millisecond time spans, much like sound bites in political campaigns.

What happened next was in the same speed time frame, maybe faster. I took one step, maybe two -into the room and whoop I hit the deck. My right leg went east and my left west. I went down like a brand new ice skater.

Crash! The monkeys, startled, went through their panic drill. The beautiful bird calls that had moments before lulled me into a sense of well being had been replaced by blood curdling squeals and the monkeys were going nowhere and everywhere all at once with the speed of if not light then sound. I was watching all this bedlam flat on my back on a wet floor. Every few seconds tiny little feet and hands would bounce off my prone body. I was in the middle of the monkey gymkhana. While awaiting the next pass through I quickly gazed about the room.

As far as I could see we had been struck by an indoor hurricane. The drapes were no longer on the windows. Nor were they dry, nor clean, nor salvageable. Nothing was. Nothing was dry nor clean nor salvageable. The place was devastated and the hyenas were still bouncing all over the room. Other senses slowly came into focus especially the

sense of smell. What was that odor? I remembered. I also realized I was lying in its source.

Finally, it all stopped. The monkeys were again seated on their favorite branch no longer screaming. They were glaring at me and chattering occasional monkey insults sprinkled with what I swear sounded like questions. I shifted a bit. I was trying to get up casually so as not to startle the maniacal creatures who had taken over my home. This was a little difficult to manage. For one, my appearance was not that of one in charge. I had just gotten up. My hair was uncombed, I needed a shave and my skinny fish-belly white legs were sticking out of my ratty flannel bathrobe which of course was covered with the source of the odor.

I did stand erect. I stood for awhile waiting to see how the wild pair would react. They did nothing. They simply sat and stared at me. They didn't chatter or squeal or move. They just sat and stared. I think they were amused. I think in their eyes I was not the head man but the clown monkey. To them, I think, I was a genetic sport, an overgrown monkey buffoon with absolutely no athletic skills and really not dangerous since I couldn't move quickly enough to harm them.

I eased my way into the kitchen and got a handful of grapes from the refrigerator. I approached the tree showing Godzilla 1 and 2 I had delicacies for them, never once averting my eyes. They remained sitting and watching me. Marty scratched his rump. I stopped within arm's length and looked up to them. Mandy yawned. I proffered a grape. Mandy took it gently with tiny graceful fingers and held it in both miniature hands. I proffered another. Mandy took it in the same manner. As I watched, they both started eating the grapes. I was entranced. Marty nipped the tip of the grape and squeezed the pulp into his mouth his head tilting back to prevent the juice from running down his chin. Mandy did the same. They were really very tidy. The skin they just threw on the floor. Garbage disposal was not a concern of theirs.

The blitz was evidently over.

I did build a cage. It was a walk-in equipped with a big tree branch and water and food bowls. I put it in my bedroom next to my desk and positioned it so that the morning sun could reach it.

For the next few years, I awakened most mornings to the sight of Marty and Mandy, arms about each other, greeting a new day with their canary song.

—Gil Miller

There is nothing in which the birds differ more from man than the way in which they can build and yet leave a landscape as it was before.

~Robert Lynd, *The Blue Lion and Other Essays*

January Speaker

Our January presentation will be "A Land Born of the Sea - The Natural History of Volusia County." Although we travel across this beautiful land we call Volusia County every day, we seldom stop to observe the signs around us that give us hints of an ancient past - of the processes that sculpted our landscape. This program will highlight how our geology set the stage for land we see today. We will investigate the origins of the St. John's River and why all the lakes in Volusia are on the west side of the county. We will see which ancient creatures left their stories behind. We will look at why our plant and animal communities are located where they are today. We will see our home landscape as a moment in a cycle of continuing change.

Presenting this program will be Michael Brothers, the Manager of Exhibits, Aquariums, and Public Programs for the Marine Science Center in Ponce Inlet, Florida. Mr. Brothers has over 30 years of experience in museum administration in city, county, state, and private non-profit museums. He is the former Executive Director of the Museum of Arts and Sciences in Daytona Beach and has served as Executive Director of the Museum of Arts and Sciences in Macon, Georgia, the Curator of Education and Statewide Services for the Museum of Florida History in Tallahassee, and, for ten years, as the Curator of Science at the Museum of Arts and Sciences in Daytona Beach. He has organized major exhibitions including The Great Asian Dinosaur Exhibition from the Russian Academy of Sciences for the museum in Daytona Beach and Mysteries of Egypt from the Canadian Museum of Civilization while in Macon, Georgia.

Mr. Brothers has a Master's Degree in Natural Resource Management and also served for nine years as visiting associate professor at Florida State University in the Museum Studies Program teaching Museum Studies. He has extensive natural resource and natural science interpretive experience including specializations in the bird life and flora of Central Florida, and has lead natural history tours throughout Florida, the Okefenokee Swamp, the Everglades, the Galapagos Islands, Kenya, Machu Picchu and the Amazon.

Mr. Brothers is currently working on The Birds of Volusia County, a summary of the avifauna of our area.

Come and bring a friend. This will be an extremely interesting presentation.

—Ken Gunn

The packaging for a microwavable "microwave" dinner is programmed for a shelf life of maybe six months, a cook time of two minutes and a landfill dead-time of centuries.

~David Wann, Buzzworm, November 1990

In the Field

Christmas Bird Count

Thirty-one SEVAS volunteers participated in this year's CBC.

Roughly 38, 000 birds — 125 species — were counted by the SEVAS members.

A full report/compilation will be available this week (we hope) on our website <http://sevolusiaaudubon.org>

Editor's Note:

Three SEVAS members did the Volusia County Landfill site.

The Landfill is another story in itself.

A very interesting place which we plan to cover in a future issue.



—G.M.

Landfill

Gil Miller

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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