



The eSkimmer

Southeast Volusia Audubon Society, Inc. Summer Email Issue Vol. II - No. 5 September, 2007

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

Prez Sez

More signs of Global Warming?

The whacky weather that produced the floods in the Midwest and the extreme temperatures from New England southward was not lost on the Tetons. We had about six weeks of highs in the mid to upper-90's and absolutely no precipitation for about three months. Nowhere is it more apparent than on the trails. I wear brown pants as part of my uniform and after four or five hours on the trails, they are light tan with dust up to my waist. My throat is dry and the water remaining in my container tastes like it has been through a cycle in the microwave oven.

On the higher slopes, the Arrowleaf Balsamroot was withering in June. These plants have 8-10 inch leaves that funnel rainwater down to the stem and into the root system. But there was no rain to funnel. Other plants were affected as well. The Blue Flax bloomed for an extraordinarily long time. Then the flowers fell and turned to seed as expected. This week, a new crop of Flax emerged, as blue as ever. Is that a sign of Spring coming already?

All the berry plants delighted visitors both in the valley and in the higher elevations. Who knows how many species there are. There are thimble berries, service berries, twin berries, bear berries, choke cherries, and many more. But the drought basically killed off the berry production. The flowers fell and left the seeds, but they did not mature. So what should have been a colorful showing of berries at trail and mountain sides was relegated to mostly green leaves.



Intruding Bear Don Picard

At the higher elevations, the White Pine nut production was nowhere near normal. The earlier, warmer spring weather seems to be allowing the Pine Bark Beetle and other parasites to kill the trees.

Unfortunately, both the berries and the pine nuts are crucial to the bears as they put on fat in preparation for hiberna-

tion. It is believed that the lack of berries and pine nuts is at least in part responsible for the bears coming down into the valley earlier and spending more time in contact with people as they try to get food from any source. My job lately has increasingly been involved in chasing bears out of campgrounds and picnic areas and educating visitors in bear safety and food storage requirements. Pictured is a 5-6 year old, 200 pound bear which I helped chase out of a picnic area.

Trumpeter Swans haven't done very well in this year's nesting season. No one is sure why, but they only know of one nesting pair in the National Elk Refuge having successfully nested. Here is a picture of the pair and their two cygnets.



Swans Don Picard

The glaciers in the mountains are looking pretty weak. Most of the ice is now covered with the ash and debris from the multitude of wild fires this summer. And some of them are getting visibly smaller by the week. How long will it be before there are no more glaciers in the Grand Tetons?

Until next time.

—Don Picard

Meetings

Meetings are held the first Wed. of each month

Oct. thru March at 7 P.M.

Next meeting is October 3, 2007

Speaker: Eric West

(see article page 3)

What is the use of a House if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on?

—Henry David Thoreau,

Wandering Members

Gainesville

Our new home in the Oak Hammock retirement center, run by the University of Florida in Gainesville has lived up to our expectations.

Sitting here in our screened back porch we have a wonderful view of nearby very tall live oaks and gum trees draped with Spanish moss that stirs slightly in the gentle early morning breeze. We do miss our former view of the backyard tidal creek and marsh, but don't miss the no see'ums. There are none here and the few mosquitoes are barred entry.

Backyard bird life is abundant, though somewhat different from our previous location. Plenty of House finches, Northern cardinals, Mourning doves, Blue jays, Common grackles, Red-bellied woodpeckers, Brown thrashers, Carolina chickadees and unidentified wrens, visit our next door neighbor's bird feeder. Sometimes a Pileated woodpecker hammers on a tall dead gum tree, but search as I can, I haven't seen an Ivory bill.

Of course we have flyover eagles and hawks and plenty of crows. Although the crows lack musical talent, they make up for it in volume of sound.

So far we haven't seen any mammals except squirrels. There are signs of moles and armadillos and we have seen a couple of garter snakes in the garage or yard.

Tiny frogs and toads hop about in the backyard. Frogs sound off in numbers far greater than we had ever heard. Each evening at dusk, the frog chorus begins with an incredible variety of tones and rhythms,

From the bass barroom of big bullfrogs to the high-pitched peeping of tree (?) frogs. If we have had rain to refresh the nearby ponds, the chorus continues with brief and sudden silences throughout the night.

At first we feared that frog concerts would disturb our sleep, but now we find them soothing, reassuring and quite sleep-inducing.

I have planted cuttings of the hybrid mulberry trees that bore such delicious fruits – generally all harvested by birds. Two of the cuttings have sprouted leaves, lending hope that they can adapt to this soil. Likewise our four tiny *Foresteria segregata* (Florida wild olive) seedlings seem healthy and any female plants should grow into wonderful bird attractors.

I've made some contacts useful to my passion for environmental issues and have noticed plenty of opportunities for environmental gains here. The editorial page editor of the Gainesville Sun has published two of my letters, one as 'letter of the week' and a longer piece will likely appear soon on the "Other Voices" page. Our local state legislator, Chuck Chestnut, seems friendly enough, and I have been bugging him to support much stronger solar energy legislation next year – and likewise not to subsidize new nukes.

Best wishes to all and keep the Chapter active!

—Lee Bidgood



Northern Alberta

In late July I decided to take a trip to Grande Prairie, Alberta, to watch one of my horses race. Grande Prairie is on the south edge of the Peace River Block, the last part of Canada (and probably North America) where you could earn a 160 acre homestead by clearing and developing it as farmland. The program ended about the time I started university.

Grande Prairie is a city of about 75,000, located some 300 miles northwest of Edmonton. The economy is based on agriculture, natural gas and oil.

Along the way, I passed areas where my crew and I had been dragged through by a bulldozer, when I was last there in the 1960s, and which are now serviced by graveled roads and power lines. Some areas have been cleared for farming but there is still considerable virgin forest. It should have been great birding but it wasn't, possibly because there was enough habitat that the birds could get far away from the noisy highway. On one side road, I did encounter a pair of White-winged Crossbills, a lifer for me, and a family of Varied Thrush living well outside their normal range.

The next day, I tried to bird around Grande Prairie but spent almost the entire morning finding a place that hadn't been overrun by 40-year-old teenagers on quads. I did see a few neat birds in the short time I had left.

After the races, I headed east 200 miles to Slave Lake, on the southeast tip of Lesser Slave Lake. The forested land along the way was full of all species of woodpeckers and sapsuckers, and provided several good looks at the very dark Interior West variation of the Hairy Woodpecker. I also passed a beautiful paved road, Highway 33, with a sign saying "Swan Hills - 56 kilometers" (34 miles). The last time I saw that particular road, the "drive" from Swan Hills took me 6 hours of real hard work.

Early the next morning, Monday, I headed north along the lake to the Boreal Bird Centre. Along the way, I stopped and walked ¼ mile down a branch of the Great Canadian Trail. This is a hiking/biking track built across Canada with offshoots into remote areas.

At the center, I was advised there was an on-going bird-banding operation a little farther along the lakeshore. I hurried up there and tagged along with the bander and his two volunteers. This is an annual all-summer project and they have a permanent station established. It was a slow day but I watched as they banded and described Ovenbirds, Tennessee Warblers and Swainson Thrush plus one White-throated Sparrow - all immature birds. I also had good looks at a Red-eyed Vireo, Canada Warbler and Magnolia Warblers and a fleeting glimpse of a Western Tanager.

I left about noon and was at our foothills cabin by eight o'clock. Overall, I only saw about 40 species but three were lifers and another six were firsts for the Canadian prairies.

—Ken Gunn

Wandering Members continues on page 3

Wandering Members

The Galapagos Islands

This is the continuing tale of our (Donnadine & Gil Miller) trip to Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands this past July.

I write some but I shoot pictures more so much of my chronological notes are visual—graphics as opposed to text. Donnadine tends to keep a journal. I keep memory cards and hard drives full of pix and when we return to home base in New Smyrna Beach, I sort and pick and create slide shows. The second installment of the current one is now finished and, for those interested, can be seen at the link posted at the end of this column.

Our first full day at sea was also our first real encounter with primeval Galapagos, uninhabited by none but the native flora & fauna, unspoiled (truly) by the onslaught of a growing humanity and our insatiable quest for more and more space. It always amazes me how little space animals take up for their residence and how much more we humans need for our nests and resting places.

To the newcomer, and we were that, the first sight of the Islands is overwhelming to say the least and those first sights are from afar. When you actually set foot on the beach of one island or the volcanic rocky crust of another you are stunned into a reverential silence at the magnificence and wonder of it all, at the absolute mystery of this world in which we live. Being far (in space AND time) from the parameters that you've always thought defined you, that you're used to using to give scale and meaning to your world and your life, you are suddenly thrust into another world—odd that it's on the same planet—that sets your heart aflutter and your mind reeling. And you think a lot about things. The unspoiled vastness of it all encourages (demands) reflection.

These inhabitants of these remarkable islands have been living their lives apart from ours, quite nicely thank you, for millennia. They've evolved uniquely enough to catch the attention of amateur and expert alike and thankfully for all of us (and them) farsighted people have determined that they should be left alone to live that way for as long as destiny (or— *fill in the blank*) chooses.

Meanwhile we can do our part and learn as much as we can from them. You'd be amazed how much happens to the thinking process (ours) just by being near these splendid fellow travellers on this spaceship earth.

—Gil Miller

Pictures being worth a couple hundred words, mine can be seen here:

Adventure in Ecuador- Pt. 1 & Pt. 2
can be seen by following the link below.
Part 3 coming soon

<http://www.photodex.com/sharing/viewalbum.html?alb=131603>

Hints:

- 1) Turn on your sound.
- 2) Click on the show icon and as it starts to load right click and choose "Full Screen" from the drop-down menu. That's it.

October's Speaker

Eric West

The guest speaker at our October 3 meeting is Mr. Eric West who will speak on the subject of (Un)reasonable Development in East Central Florida.

Eric graduated from Winter Park High School in 1962 and from FSU in 1967. He received his masters degree from FSU in 1972. He worked as a Peace Corp volunteer in Liberia from 1967 through 1970, as Curator of Animals for the Tallahassee Jr. Museum from 1972 until 1975 and later, briefly, for the Maymont Foundation in Richmond, Virginia. He then moved to Annapolis, Maryland to pursue one of his other loves, sailing. He worked as a Young Adult Librarian for the Anne Arundel County Library System and then as a sail maker for two years before returning to Florida aboard his own boat. Since then he has spent 16 years as a yacht broker, owning his own brokerage, Eagle Yachts, Inc.; racing sailboats; delivering boats and training people to operate powerboats and sailboats.

Eric was active in the civil rights movement in the early 1960's and has worked in political campaigns all his life. He opposed the pollution of the Fenholloway River by the Buckeye Paper Plant in the late 1960's. More recently, in his own words, he "has been involved in trying to bring Volusia County and the SJRWMD into the twenty-first century with regard to stormwater management and development codes."

Eric is an environmental advocate who is well known for studying the issues, proposing alternative solutions and rebutting developers' arguments with a passion. His views regularly run counter to the claims and desires of Volusia County Council, Saint Johns River Water Management District, and other local governments, not to mention Florida's land developers.

His knowledge of the perils of rampant development and his studied approach to draw attention to it and hopefully thwart it, are demonstrated in the following letter which he recently wrote in response to "The Final Report of the Committee for a Sustainable Treasure Coast." This was distributed to several members of the media, Volusia County Council members and other local leaders. (I'm glad he's on our side.)

—Ken Gunn

Ed.note: Eric West's letter has not been reproduced here because of space limitations.

It is, however, well worth reading and can be found at our website: <http://thewanderers.stewart.net/sevas/sevas.htm>

Fact

Did you know that Kenya has over 30,000 residential solar systems —more than any other nation, even California? The catch is, the Kenya systems are very small, 20 to 100 watts capacity. By comparison most Florida residential systems range from 1,500 to 3,500 watts.

—Lee Bidgood

From the Field

NAMC In Florida Fall 2007

The North American Migration Count in Florida is sponsored by Florida Ornithological Society, and is supported by local Audubon Societies, local bird clubs, and other interested organizations.

PURPOSE: The mission of the North American Migration Count (NAMC) is to:

- Obtain a “snapshot” of the progress and “shape” of spring and fall Migration.

- Obtain information on the abundance & distribution of each species.

- Initiate more participation among birders within a state and between states.

- Create challenges and goals among birders while collecting useful information.

- Aid in organization and centralization of date.

HAVE FUN.

AREA OF COUNT: The area of a count is not a circle, but the boundaries of a County. The idea is to have a contiguous interlocking set of non-overlapping counts across North America. It is desirable to get as much of each county surveyed as resources permit.

TIMING OF THE COUNT: Each spring and fall another picture will be acquired of the migration pattern. From these we may discover the shape of migration particular to each species. The date of NAMC has been chosen to capture as many migrants as possible before they reach the final destination. It will not be peak migration everywhere. The Southern areas will have the lingerers and the northern areas will still await many of the breeding species when the spring count takes place.

COUNT DATES: The NAMC takes place across North America on the third Saturday of September and the second Saturday of May each year. The near-term counts are September 15, 2007, May 10, 2008, and September 20, 2008.

If anyone would like to help on Saturday Sept 15,

Call Gail @ 428-0447.

Our Email Address

the.skimmer@yahoo.com

If you'd like to have The eSkimmer emailed monthly, contact us at the above address. Type Subscribe in the subject line.

Our Website

<http://thewanderers.stewart.net/sevas/sevas.htm>

Please forward this  to friends.

Native & Nice

Sapindus saponaria

He's never steered me wrong, so when Kevin at Full Moon Natives Nursery suggested that I put in a soapberry tree (*Sapindus saponaria*) for a little variety, I was game. As always, I was looking for a tree that was low-maintenance: tolerant of poor soil, adaptable to full sun, pest-free, and drought resistant. Also, it should grow into an attractive shade tree. Soapberry fits the bill.



A testament to the soapberry's adaptability is that it is found from Kansas to Argentina as well as in the West Indies. In more northern places, it is deciduous, but remains evergreen in Florida. It grows to about 25 feet in our area and has a leafy, densely branched, rounded crown. I'm looking forward to the promised masses of small greenish-white flowers in the spring.

Early cultures found the soapberry tree very useful. The flesh of the fruit forms abundant suds in water, and the blossoms produce an excellent honey. At one time the crushed, poisonous seeds were used as an insecticide or thrown into the water to stun or poison fish (a practice now illegal in Florida). Even though the seeds are poisonous, I'm interested to see them; they were once used for marbles, buttons, and jewelry-making.

—Donnadine Miller

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Ways & Means, Education/Outreach, Hospitality
are also VACANT!

We need YOU to fill one of these vacant spaces!