

Our February speaker will be Dr. Gabriel Vargo, Associate Professor Emeritus at the College of Marine Science, University of South Florida and the Florida's Seabird Ecological Assessment Network (SEANET) coordinator. SEANET is a volunteer based program designed to provide information that can be used to assess threats to sea and shore birds and to the near shore ecosystem.

Live and beached bird counts along with environmental data collected during twice monthly beach surveys can be used as indicators of ecosystem health, to determine baseline mortality rates and to identify specific threats to nearshore avian populations. The program currently has volunteers on beaches from Maine to New Jersey, Georgia and Florida where it is seeking to expand its efforts on the east coast.

Dr. Vargo is originally from New Jersey. He earned his BSc (Botany) and MSc (Botany) from University of Miami and his PhD in Biological Oceanography from University of Rhode Island. He moved to University of South Florida in 1980 and took retirement at the beginning of 2008. Dr. Vargo has spent much of his career studying the physiology and ecology of Florida's Red Tide organism and recently shifted his focus to assess the impacts of red tide toxin on sea and shore birds. He will present an overview of the SEANET program and a summary of the impact of the 2005 red tide event on sea birds based on thesis work by two of his students.