



The eSkimmer

Southeast Volusia Audubon Society, Inc.

Issue Vol. V- No. 7

December, 2010

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

Prez Sez

—Don Picard

Anybody remember the Macondo Well? In case you forgot, it is the name of the well on which the Deepwater Horizon rig was placed and which blew up, spewing about 185 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. You hardly see a mention of it any more. Is it really done? What about the damage to the ecosystems and livelihoods of affected families and businesses? Has it all been repaired? What about the oil that was "dispersed"? What will be its impact on the Gulf floor? Independent researchers from the University of Southern Mississippi, University of Georgia and Texas A&M University have found oil in sediment samples within a 140 mile radius of the well; some of the oil was two inches thick. The implication is that there is a vast amount of oil on the bottom of the Gulf.

Despite this, we have apparently gone back to business as usual. The Obama Administration lifted the moratorium on deep-water drilling in the Gulf for oil and gas but what assurances do we have that the culture of cost-cutting and profit at any cost has changed to one of safety for rig workers and the environment?

And now that the elections are over, will there be any real oversight but federal agencies over the oil and gas companies? With the climate change deniers getting more vocal by the day, what will become of our attempt to slow the pace of climate change for our children and grandchildren?

OOPS! Hold the presses. The light at the end of the tunnel may not be a freight train after all. On the 1st of December, the NY Times is reporting that the Obama Administration is rescinding its earlier decision to allow drilling on the Eastern Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic for at least five years pending the establishment of stronger safety and environmental measures.

Lest we forget about over-development in Florida, the Department of Community Affairs is under fire from Governor Scott. He calls the DCA a job killer. This despite the fact that the DCA approved developments of 600,000 residential units and a billion square feet of non-residential (commercial) units in the last year. The DCA forced the city of Edgewater, Volusia County and the Restoration developers to come up with a much better plan than we

Meetings

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

Edgewater Library 103 Indian River Blvd.

*Smoke-free environment. Refreshments are served.
Plenty of parking. Public welcome.*

Next meeting is December 15, 2010

Speaker - **Bob Montanaro.**

Pelican Island Audubon Society

Picture story of a pair of nesting Osprey

see December Speaker p. 2

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.

Fri, Dec 17, 2010 (3) Spruce Creek - 8 a.m.

Sun, Jan 2, 2011 Christmas Bird Count - 7 a.m.

Fri, Jan 7, 2011 (1) Merritt Island NWR - 7 a.m.

A complete list of field trips is available on the SEVAS website.

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.

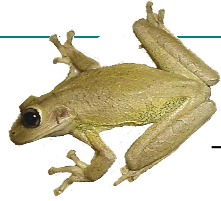
Audubon members and guests are all welcome.

Growing up, my Mom always claimed to feel bad when a bird would slam head-first into our living room window. If she "really" felt bad, though, she'd have moved the bird feeder outside.

~Rich Johnson

See Prez p. 2

Conservation Notes



—Lee Bidgood

Bird Watching

I was never much interested in building a "life count" of birds, although I usually helped on the Christmas or migratory bird counts, which provided data for bird conservation.

The thing I enjoy most about birds is just watching them to appreciate their beauty, intelligence and sometimes surprising behavior.

In New Smyrna Beach I remember when two Fish crows sort of adopted me. I was cleaning fish on the table on our backyard creek-front small pier when two crows approached. One held back while the other approached fairly closely, evidently looking for a handout. I put some fish guts on the far end of the table, and that donation was readily accepted.

Thereafter, the two crows often showed up whenever I walked out to the pier. I fed them regularly, coaxing the bold one ever closer until it readily took food from my hand. Their favorite snack was cheese pizza. Sometimes they gulped down everything, but often they stashed food in a crevice under our rain gutter. I named them Pot (the bold one) and Kettle, for their color.

Another favorite sight in our NSB backyard was the immature Cooper's Hawk bathing in our birdbath. It usually appeared weekly or even more often. We concluded that it was an adolescent, freshening up to attract the opposite sex.

Then there was a majestic Great Horned Owl who frequently roosted and rested during the day in our largest backyard pine tree. His/Her Majesty ignored any humans in the backyard or on the patio, or even the reporter who used up a roll of film taking snapshots from every angle.

For me, the most surprising bird behavior was the immature (white) Little Blue Heron eating butterflies. Florida White or Cabbage Butterflies were swarming thickly on low-hanging flowering vegetation in our backyard. I watched that Little Blue gulp down more than a dozen, wings and all.

Here in our Oak Hammock retreat in Gainesville we watched with great interest and delight a Pileated Woodpecker. Catherine was looking out the window and spotted it in our side yard, downhill from our residence. The woodpecker was perched on the lower limb of a small magnolia and feasting on the red seeds in a pod. Although we had both seen a good number of Pileateds over the years, this one seemed unusually colorful.

I was amazed at its brilliant, dazzling red color; then I realized we were looking down on its back, whereas we had watched other Pileateds from below.

Some Skimmer readers may have heard these NSB stories before; forgive me if I have repeated myself.

Happy birding!

Lee Bidgood is Conservation Chair, emeritus.

He writes from Gainesville, FL where he lives with his wife Catherine.

HELP WANTED

The Florida Wildflower Foundation is in need of volunteers to help at its booth at the Florida Wildflower & Garden Festival in DeLand on March 26, 2011. If you could spend a couple of hours lending a hand, please contact Lisa Roberts at 407-353-6164 or lroberts@flwildflowers.org.

Prez from p. 1

would have seen if they were left to their own devices. And they took Farmton to the administrative judge whose decision is expected shortly. With the demise of Amendment 4, we need a strong DCA to force local leaders and developers to engage in smart growth instead of the continuing the "develop anything that stands still" mentality.

Despite the fact that Mr Scott ran his campaign against "insiders and special interests", the list of names on his inaugural celebration committee reads like a "who's who" of special interests. It includes senior executives from U.S. Sugar, Florida Crystals sugar company (Everglades restoration anyone?), Wayne Huizenga (ex-owner of the Miami Dolphins), a major developer from Miami, and Jim France of the NASCAR family.

2011 will be an interesting year. We need to keep our finger on the pulse of politics and make sure the law-makers who represent us know our needs if we want any voice at all.

Happy Holidays.

The 111th Christmas Bird Count: Tuesday, December 14, 2010 to Wednesday, January 5, 2011

From December 14 through January 5, tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas take part in an adventure . . .

<http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count>

111th Ponce Inlet Christmas Bird Count, Sunday January 2, 2011.

Please call Gail @ (386) 428-0447 to help in this important annual event.

Please forward this

eSkimmer

to friends.

From the Field

—Don Picard

Woodruff Walk

Five people spent a beautiful day at Lake Woodruff NWR.

There were lots of warblers, especially Palm and Yellow-rumped, some kinglets, gnatcatchers and phoebes.

There were lots of coots, moorhens and a few Sandhill Cranes. The highlight was a Red-Shouldered Hawk that stood perched for about fifteen minutes so everyone could get a good look (and a picture or twenty).



Don Picard



Don Picard

Some ducks were in, especially blue and green-winged teals and Northern Shovelers. One Great Blue Heron intrigued us by carrying around a three-foot stick. He did not do anything with it, just carried it. After a while, he just set it down.

There were lots of sparrows, including Savannah, Swamp and Vespers. On the way out, we saw a Merlin perched high in a tree. In all, we saw 46 species of birds and twice that number of vultures. Nancy enjoyed walking among them. I thought I heard her mumble something about it being hard to soar with the eagles when you are surrounded by a bunch of buzzards.



Nancy White and friends

Don Picard

This story with more pix can be found on the SEVAS web site blog.

<http://blog.sevolusiaudubon.org/>

You know that if I were reincarnated, I'd want to come back a buzzard. Nothing hates or envies him, or wants him or needs him. He is never bothered and he can eat anything.

~William Faulkner

Native 'n' Nice

—Donnadine Miller

Blue Porterweed

Every butterfly garden in our area should have at least one Blue Porterweed (*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*). This fast-growing tender perennial is especially attractive to Long-tailed Skippers. Porterweed is a well-formed shrub that grows to 4'-6' tall and about that wide. Its dark, evergreen foliage forms long spikes where small blue flowers appear repeatedly throughout the year.

Porterweed is a very tolerant native. It withstands drought, grows in almost any soil, and enjoys partial shade to full sun. Because it self-sows, young Porterweed plants spring up near mature plants, ready to dig up and share with a friend.

Donnadine Miller was an active member of SEVAS and wrote this column for years for *The Skimmer*.

She passed away April 7, 2008.

This archived article is from *The Skimmer*, Dec. 2004

December Speaker

—Ken Gunn

Bob Montanaro.

Our speaker for December will be Bob Montanaro. This will be Bob's second presentation to our club. Three years ago Bob presented a photographic story of a pair of Osprey who nested at the Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge. The pictures were beautiful and expressive and the story compelling, but, sadly, the nesting failed. This year's presentation is of two nesting pair and has a much more satisfactory result.

The program provides an intimate look through still and video photography into the day-to-day activities of two pairs of nesting Osprey from the very beginning of the nesting season to the end. The program also offers a wide exposure to the many different species of wildlife that live in the nation's first National Wildlife Refuge.

Bob is a native Floridian and grew up in Vero Beach. He holds a B.A. in History from the University of Central Florida and a M.A. in U.S. History from Florida State University. More importantly from our point of view, he is a long-time volunteer at both Pelican Island & Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuges and is the current office manager for the Pelican Island Audubon Society. He has been interested in photography and wildlife, especially the Osprey, all his life. He maintains a website <http://www.ospreywatch.org/> which displays many of his photographs and lists his presentation schedule.

Mark December 15 on your calendar.

Backyard Naturalist

—Gil Miller

Brrrr.

Donnadine, my late wife, didn't care much for the cold weather of Baltimore winters so she announced in January 1997—in the middle of a harsh winter that wouldn't let go—that we were moving to Florida. Okay by me. We had visited Florida in August of '96—my first visit ever—and I thought it was a nice place. Hot, but no hotter than Baltimore in summer. We left Baltimore on a search & find (a home) mission for Florida on a bitter cold January day. Winter was howling and throwing everything at us. I recall that it was 17° that morning. We landed in Orlando around lunch time and people were strolling around in shorts and tees. And I saw butterflies. In winter! Sold! By May we had bought a house and settled in.

We joined SEVAS in 1998 and took part in the meetings and the field trips. I was much younger and more full of vinegar in those halcyon days and I didn't mind getting up with the dawn. We were in a new place, a new routine and everything seemed to be a marvelous adventure.

I don't remember participating in a Christmas Bird Count until the CBC of January 4, 2003. Maybe we participated in earlier ones but I do know we took part in this one. It was our last one.

It was still dark when we got to the Brannon Center. The scene was ethereal. Of course, it was still dark. To add to the effect, it was overcast. A cold mist feathered the area, giving the street lights halos. Folks were milling about, not talking much, mostly just stepping in place hugging themselves to keep warm. Somebody mentioned that it was 32°. That helped a lot.

Since this was Florida, I hadn't bothered with gloves. Who thinks of Florida and gloves? My fingers were so stiff from the cold that I couldn't control my camera shutter. I had my new Canon 60D DSLR but I couldn't actually use it until 9:30 a.m. when I managed to snap this image of the beach near the jetty at Smyrna Dunes Park. I called it *Winter Beach* and subsequently used it on several holiday cards. The sand looks enough like snow to give the shot that nice winter feeling.

It seems to me we made it to lunch time. Maybe not. But I do distinctly remember Donnadine, in the car on the way home, saying through still chattering teeth but with steel in her tone, "That's the last time we're doing this one."

Okay by me. I'm glad she said "we".

Which brings us up to now. The 111th CBC is coming

up and I plan on participating. If you read any earlier *Backyard Naturalist* columns you'll know I'm unabashedly, a non-birder. I've admitted that without shame many times. Donnadine was the birder. I just liked going along on field trips and snapping images of anything that caught my fancy, flora as well as fauna (which included a lot of pix of birders looking for birds).

But last January (the 110th CBC) Gail Domroski asked if I would like to participate in the CBC while riding in a truck over the hills and dales of the Volusia Landfill.

Would !! Is a brown bear, brown? What an adventure. The plan was that Roger Cutler, Jeff Reinhart—bona fide birders, both—would be in the party and the truck would be driven by Jeff Jones a landfill staff member.

It turned out that Jeff Jones was more than up to the task. He took us all over the place and explained in detail the workings of the landfill environment. Jeff is down and out *green*. He's one of us! He was the right guy for this job and it was plain he enjoyed it. He gave, in detail, a running narrative of how and why things were done and he showed an honest interest in the CBC.

The mountains of trash and the almost countless numbers of birds (we did come up with a count) that have become dependent on the landfill brought thoughts of Mr. Darwin to mind. This was a unique birding spot. A man-made sanctuary that the birds found suitable.

During the break at the last SEVAS meeting, Gail asked if I would be interested in doing the CBC at the landfill again this time. Roger and Jeff were standing right there and we all agreed that we'd love to do it.

This time, I'm taking my Sony digital recorder as well as my camera. I'll be recording both sound and images. I'll get the sounds of the thousands of birds and the narration of Jeff Jones.

There's a story in there and I want it.



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Thanks to Fern Murphy for proofing this issue (in fact, every issue).



Winter Beach

Gil Miller