

Pelican Island Audubon Society

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- founded in 1964 to serve Indian River County -

P.O. Box 1833, VERO BEACH, FL 32961 772-567-3520 www.PelicanIslandAudubon.org

Our 50th Year Vol. 50 No. 2 February 2015

Our Mission: To preserve and protect the animals, plants, and natural communities in Indian River County through advocacy, education, and public awareness.

February 9, 2015 ❖ 6:00 p.m.

**Art & Agriculture: A Pastoral Connection
with Sean Sexton**

North Indian River County Library
1001 Sebastian Blvd. (CR 512), Sebastian

Local cattle rancher, artist, and poet, Sean Sexton, grandson of Waldo Sexton, will discuss the connection between art and agriculture. 500 years after Juan Ponce de Leon brought cattle to Florida in 1521, the Sexton family continues the tradition with four generations of Sextons having raised cattle in Indian River County at their Treasure Hammock Ranch. Through his art, Sean will provide an overview of his life as a rancher in the Florida cattle industry.

A huge **THANK YOU** to volunteers generously devoting their days and skills for the Beginning Birding Course to Susan Boyd, Jack Casselberry, Carolyn Cimino, Becky Loftus, Bill Loftus, David Simpson, & George Thomas and to Jane Schnee and Peter Sutherland for leading our field trips.



Donate to Audubon House

Diane Morgan and John Warner made a generous donation of a Great Blue Heron outdoor statue to be displayed around our new Audubon House. Maybe others would like to donate some. Please call our office at 772-567-3520 if you would like to donate one.

Donations are also needed for the finishing touches to support our new Building.

February 16, 2015 ❖ 7:30 p.m.

**Ecology of the Florida Scrub-Jay
with Reed Bowman, Ph.D.**

Vero Beach Community Center
2266 14th Avenue, Vero Beach

Reed Bowman, Ph.D., from the Archbold Biological Station's Avian Ecology Program, will talk about the natural history of the Florida Scrub-Jay and the history of the 45-year study of them at Archbold.

Dr. Reed Bowman is the Director of the Avian Ecology Program at Archbold Biological Station in south-central Florida. He holds graduate degrees in wildlife and biology from McGill University and the University of South Florida. Over the last 30 years he has studied the ecology, demography, and conservation of several threatened and endangered birds. His primary research now focuses on the ecology of Florida Scrub-Jays in a variety of different landscapes using long-term data on marked populations. The study of scrub-jays at Archbold, overseen by Dr. Bowman, is the longest-running study of marked birds in North America, now entering its 46th continuous year. He is an author on more than 80 scientific papers and book chapters, the editor of two books and co-author of the recently published second edition of "Florida Bird Species". He has made more than 120 public presentations about science, ecology, and conservation. He is a Fellow of the American Ornithologists' Union, President of the Association of Field Ornithologists, and past President of the Florida Ornithological Society.

Field Trips - Call 772-567-3520 for reservations

Feb 7 (Sat) Oslo Riverfront Conservation Area - Call 954-270-2840 for reservations and information.

Feb 14 (Sat) Treasure Hammock Ranch - birding tour of a working cattle ranch

Feb 15 (Sun) Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park

Feb 21 (Sat) Barrier Island Sanctuary - tour the Sanctuary and search for pelagic birds

March 7 (Sat) Oslo Riverfront Conservation Area - Call 954-270-2840 for reservations and information.

Masthead photo: American Kestrel by Bob Montanaro.

January Bird of the Month by Juanita Baker

Do you have trees around your home with some open areas of lawn? You may have an Eastern Screech Owl in your backyard! Less wary of humans than many other birds, this small owl occupies the broadest variety of habitats of any owl in the U.S., eating a wide range of foods (insects, earthworms, crayfish, small birds and rodents). All they need is a suitable tree cavity or nest box for nesting - "If you build it, they will come."

Photographer Peter H. Connelly bought a nesting box and outfitted it with a camcorder. He has watched the owls every spring (March to June) build a nest and nurture their brood. Peter observed that the female spends most of her time in the box, leaving only briefly at dusk. The female incubates the eggs for one month. Once the eggs hatch, the male spends his night bringing food to the entrance for the chicks, giving it to the female or just dropping it in. With his Canon 7D and Canon EF-S 18-200 mm lens, Peter photographed these two young owls peaking out of their box the day before fledging.



Limmee See Too! Screech Owls © 2014 Peter H. Connelly

When alarmed, Screech Owls emit squeal-like, not terrifying screeches. Their most commonly heard call is a rather quiet descending trill, often used as one of the spooky night sounds in graveyard horror films.

Similar to the much larger Great Horned Owl (up to 16"), these tiny owls (7"-9") have "ear" tufts of feathers (not really their ears which are instead on the side of their heads beneath feathers). Difficult for others to see, especially at night, with camouflaged coloration like surrounding tree bark, Screech Owls sit very still and wait for unsuspecting prey to scurry into view, then make a straight perch-to-prey snatch.

View a large color image and learn how to enter your own photos at www.PelicanIslandAudubon.org

Wings of Blue by Linda Chancellor

Flashes of cerulean blue feathers passed to the right and left of me and disappeared into the twiggy scrub oaks. Our walk, guided by Jane Schnee, had started at 7:30 am and within twenty minutes of entering the North Sebastian Conservation Area we had encountered Florida scrub jays. Jane is passionate about Florida scrub jays and also volunteers with the **Audubon Jay Watch** program. I had been on two other field trips to observe Florida scrub jays and saw only a few birds at a distance. This trip proved to be very different. Here the jays flew within a few feet of me. The blue feathers on their heads, wings and tail would change in a minute from a glowing royal blue to a soft slate blue depending on the light reflecting off of it. I could even make out the colors of the identification bands on their legs. The birds followed us flitting from tree to tree and then they would start shrieking. Jane explained that this untypical behavior was the result of people offering food to these birds. The birds now approach and expect handouts. While this change in behavior had provided us with some great photo opportunities it was clear human intervention had interfered with their natural foraging behavior. As we proceeded along the trail Jane pointed out the different plants that make up this unique scrub habitat, and educated us as to how fire and the removal of volunteer pines is necessary to keep the habitat low and open for the scrub jays.

We encountered several other habitats including beautiful wetlands and saw a number of other species of birds but the highlight for me was the opportunity to see Florida scrub

jays in their native scrub habitat.

FYI – The Florida scrub jay is the state's only endemic bird species and is found nowhere else in the world.

At the beginning of the trail there is a sign stating the state law that it is illegal to feed Florida scrub jays as it disrupts natural feeding and breeding behavior. .

An entry on the website Focusing on Wildlife lists these points:

1. Peanuts are not as nutritious as the native scrub oak acorns.
2. If the jays rely on humans they will not cache as many acorns, some of which would germinate into new trees thus maintaining the scrub habitat.
3. Birds that rely on peanuts breed earlier and the baby birds hatch before caterpillars, their main food source, hatch in sufficient quantities.

To learn more about the **Audubon Jay Watch** project go to fl.audubon.org/jay-watch.



Florida Scrub-Jay by Bob Montanaro.

Like Pelican Island Audubon on Facebook at
www.PelicanIslandAudubon.org
for all the latest news and information

facebook

It is not just Polar Bears in Trouble!

What Birds Tell Us about Climate Change

Since 1500, over 190 species of birds have become extinct. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_recently_extinct_birds). That rate is increasing. Approximately 1,200 are considered to be under threat of extinction of the world's 10,000 bird species. The National Audubon science team's seven-year study found that more than half of U.S. bird species (314 of 588) will be seriously threatened by 2080, and any of those could disappear forever (Audubon, September-October 2014 issue on line at Audubon.org/climate).

Granted, it is difficult for many of us to detect the gradual rise in global temperatures, the subtle shifts in weather patterns, and our favorite birding habitats dwindling, but the birds have done so. Birds migrate to traditional locales that may have disappeared from habitat destruction, resulting in dwindling habitats where they may die from crowding, disease or hunting. Last year, our Earth had the hottest year since records began being kept in 1880; 10 of the hottest years on record have occurred since 1997. Our largest increase in atmospheric CO² occurred from 2012 to 2013. Clearly, humans are responsible for this global warming and species extinctions because of our nonrenewable energy consumption, habitat destruction with loss of food including insects, invasives, and killing and overharvesting of species.

Using citizen-scientist-collected data from 100 years plus of Audubon Christmas Bird Counts and the North American Breeding Bird Survey, Audubon's scientists charted a "climate envelope" for each North American species that included temperature range, rainfall, and other climate characteristics, then compared these envelopes with computer-mapped projections of the global climate at the end of this century (All 314 interpretive maps and species listed can be seen at Audubon.org/climate).

Of the 314 species, 126 were classified as "Climate-endangered" and are projected to lose more than 50% of their current ranges by 2050 and may face extinction (Bald Eagle, Osprey, and Brown Pelican, to name a few). The other 188 species are "Climate Threatened" and are expected to lose more than 50% of their current ranges by 2080 (Roseate Spoonbill, Florida Scrub Jay, and many others).

Acting immediately is imperative. **Scientists say we only have 50 years to figure it out!** It will require huge capital and rethinking. A wait-and-see strategy has not, and will not, work! Unfortunately, many Americans and their political leaders are in denial of climate change when over 99% of published journal articles agree that human-caused climate change is happening (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surveys_of_scientists%27_views_on_climate_change). Is climate-change a vast conspiracy on the part of scientists or is denial a tactic used by special-interest groups to sow

doubt and inspire inaction? Follow the money trail and decide for yourselves!

We have a choice. Do nothing and have future generations suffer the consequences, or take action. Here are a few suggestion of what we can do individually and as a member of Pelican Island Audubon. There are many more:

- Create a bird-friendly yard by planting native plants, including grasses and trees, to replace nonnative sod.
- Improve the Indian River Lagoon water quality by working with others to eliminate septic tanks and following the new fertilizer ordinances.
- Write a letter to the Press Journal advocating taking steps to reduce climate changes and prepare for sea level rise.
- Meet with our local leaders to get them to purchase conservation lands and promote public transportation and safe bike lanes.
- Urge politicians and public utilities to promote use of renewable energy sources through rebates and tax incentives.
- Prevent our home energy loss through insulation, white roofs, and by planting shade trees.
- Eat locally produced food, reducing food transportation costs.
- Use less water and energy.

There are some new ideas for a warming world:

- Hexagonal photovoltaic bricks join together to cover parking lots, roads, train tracks.
- Solar panels on roofs including parking lots.
- Feeding more people with less land and energy input by promoting healthier diets that include more vegetables, less meat and using non-traditional, high-protein foods that can be added to our diet. For example, in Ohio, a farm sells crickets from which powder can be added to flour to make healthier, tasty products.
- Making carbonate cement from captured carbon from power plant flue gas.
- Modernize our outdated power grid with cutting-edge technology.
- Copy the Sun. In France a 34-nation coalition aims to produce energy by fusing heavy hydrogen isotopes. In cloudy Germany, almost 40% of electricity is now produced from solar grids.
- Follow federal mandate to increase 18-wheelers fuel efficiency by 50% this year from 2009 levels.
- Recycle more, compost food, cow manure and plant waste to fertilize ranch grasslands.
- **Ween** ourselves off a carbon based economy, **go** solar and wind, **invent** a whole new electric grid.

Will it require another Hurricane Sandy to wake us up? I hope not.

Pelican Island Audubon Society Officers & Directors

Officers: President **Richard H. Baker, Ph.D.**, 1st Vice President **Bob Bruce**, 2nd Vice President **Susan Boyd**, Recording Secretary **Darlene Halliday**, Corresponding Secretary **Peter Sutherland**, Treasurer **Steve Goff** — Elected Directors: **David Cox, Ph.D. '17**, **Graham Cox, Ph.D. '17**, **Nancy Irvin '16**, **Bill Loftus, Ph.D. '15**, **Toni Robinson '16** — Appointed Board Members: **Bill Halliday**, **Tina Marchese**, **Diane Morgan**, **David Peabody**, **Bonnie Swanson**, **Corry Westbrook**

Pelican Island Audubon Society, Inc. is registered with the Florida Dept. of Agriculture & Consumer Services. A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the Div. of Consumer Services by calling toll-free within Florida 1-800-435-7352. Registration does not imply endorsement, approval, or recommendation by the State.

Birds migrate-and members can too!
Please consider "migrating" up to one of our Sustainable Memberships- Scrub-jay (\$100) or Osprey (\$200).

Anyone who contributes \$100 or \$200 per year to the Annual Fund is automatically recognized as a Pelican Island Audubon Society Sustaining or Double Sustaining Member. Think about a \$25 or \$50 per quarter donation, which works out to only \$2 to \$4 a week to support our mission.

Sustaining Members are critical to the Society. If every Society member contributed \$100 or \$200 every year, PIAS could increase its efforts to help fulfill our mission in Indian River County and support the continued growth of our programs. This is a tax-deductible contribution to a 501(c)(3) organization and includes your membership renewal to Pelican Island Audubon!

\$100 Florida Scrub-Jay Level \$200 Osprey Level

Other Annual Membership Options:

\$20 Individual \$30 Family

Is this a membership renewal? Yes No

Join National Audubon Society for an additional \$20 a year.

I want to make an additional tax deductible donation of \$ _____

Total \$ _____

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

E-Mail _____

Please send your name and address along with a check payable to the "Pelican Island Audubon Society" to:

Pelican Island Audubon Society

P.O. Box 1833, Vero Beach, FL 32961

Credit card payments call (772) 567-3520 M-F 9AM-1PM

Please email us if there is a local environmental issue which concerns you at piaudubon@bellsouth.net

Plant of the Month by Janice Broda

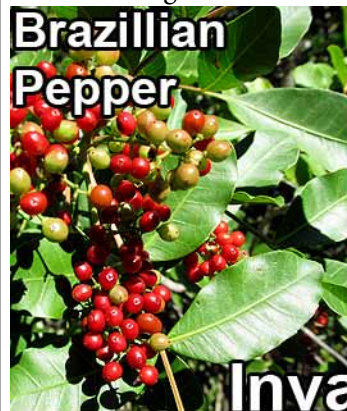
Invasive pest plants cost the United States more than \$34.7, and they are a major problem at the Audubon House and the adjacent Oslo Riverfront Conservation Area. Volunteers from the joint Florida Medical Entomology Laboratory and Pelican Island Audubon Society nature volunteer stewardship class are already working to control Brazilian pepper (*Schinus terebinthifolius*), shoebutton ardisia (*Ardisia elliptica*), air potato (*Dioscorea bulbifera*), caesarweed (*Urena lobata*), and other pernicious invaders.

Fructivorous migrating birds (such as robins and cedar waxwings) spread the fleshy fruits of Brazilian pepper and the less know shoebutton ardisia. A tropical plant shoebutton ardisia, is 'marching' northward to become common in our County and is still sold in the landscape nursery trade.

Brazilian pepper, which covers more than 740,000 acres below Lake Okeechobee and ranges north to Volusia County, and air potato are on the Florida State Noxious Weeds List, and, hence their cultivation and sale are prohibited. A member of the yam family (Dioscoraceae), air potato is spread by bulbils or "potatoes".

Mammals, especially humans, most likely are responsible for the spread of its bulbils, which vary wildly in shape or size from dime-sized to bigger than a "regular" potato. Mammals, especially pesky humans, also are primarily responsible for the spread of "camp-follower" caesarweed, as the "sticky spines" of its "burs" stick to clothes and hair.

National invasive species (not just plants) week is from February 22 through February 28. You can find out more about what you can do at <http://www.nisaw.org> or the Audubon House, which will have an invasive plant display during this week if a certificate of occupancy has been issued. Check the PIAS website for more information: <http://pelicanislandaudubon.org>.



Brazilian Pepper

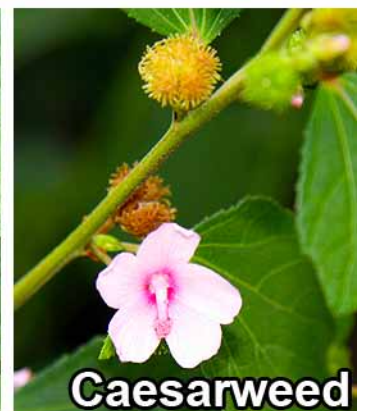


Shoebutton Ardisia

Invasive Plants



Air Potato



Caesarweed