



Pelican Island Audubon Society

Peligrum

- 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. 3 March 2014

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

March 10, 2014 ❖ 6:00 p.m.

**Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary
with Brewster Mosely**

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

Brewster Mosely's photo essay covers his many visits to Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (a Florida Audubon sanctuary near Naples, Florida) over the decades to document the flora and fauna of the sanctuary, especially the Wood Stork population, current and historic.

Brewster Mosely and his wife, AJ, moved to Vero Beach from Sun Valley, Idaho, last December, and he works as a freelance writer and photographer for Vero Beach Magazine.

March 17, 2014 ❖ 7:30 p.m.

**The decline in Snail Kites, sparse snails,
and a hot pink distraction
with Dr. Philip Darby**

**Vero Beach Community Center
2266 14th Avenue, Vero Beach**

Phil Darby has been doing research on apple snails and snail kites in central and south Florida for 20 years. Phil and his wife Patty started out as field technicians working on snail kite telemetry and population monitoring. Phil earned his Ph.D. from the University of Florida in Gainesville ('98) by completing a dissertation devoted to understanding the relationship between water level fluctuations and apple snail population demography. He has over 20 publications on various aspects of apple snail and snail kite ecology. Phil and Patty co-founded the Pomacea Project in 2008, a non-profit organization devoted to disseminating information on the management and conservation of apple snails, kites, and other Florida wetlands fauna (www.pomaceaproject.org).

Phil is currently a Professor at the University of West Florida in Pensacola, where snails and kites continue to be the focus of his research program.

Phil's talk will focus on how native apple snail populations have declined in the Everglades, the possible causes of this decline, especially prior to the invasion of the exotic snail, and how the snail kite has responded to changes in their food supply (native and exotic).



Now available!

The updated and expanded second edition of
**Reflections of Blue Cypress:
Photographs, History, and Poems**
by **Richard H. Baker, Ph.D. and Juanita Baker, Ph.D.**

Only \$37.40 includes tax

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Pelican Island Audubon Society

P.O. Box 1833

Vero Beach, FL 32961

Other purchasing options:

online at www.pelicanislandaudubon.org

or at one of our general meetings

Field Trips

March 5 - Wednesday - Quality of Life Indicators - Guide: Graham Cox

March 7 - Friday - Padgett Creek Ranches - Guide: Ralph Monticello

March 15 - Saturday - Oslo Riverfront Conservation Area - Guide: Ken Gonyo

March 20 - Thursday - Wakodahatchee Wetlands/Green Cay - Guide: Bill Loftus

March 23 - Sunday - Orlando Wetlands Park - Guides: Steve Goff and Susan Boyd

March 29 - Saturday - Circle B Bar Preserve - Guides: Bill & Darlene Halliday

For more information call 772-567-3520
or visit www.pelicanislandaudubon.org

Masthead photo: Mottled Duck by Bob Montanaro.

Bird of the Month by Juanita Baker

Photo title: First Date—'I don't know about this.'
by Milton Heiberg - Fish Crow *Corvus ossifragus*

Crows, like many birds, are more vocal when they begin earnest mating rituals in February and March. The male Fish Crow on the right, slightly larger, is the ardent pursuer. This female seems reluctant, doesn't she? Being all black, it is very difficult to take good photographs of crows, yet Milton Heiberg, with a Canon EOS 40D f/5.6 at 1/90 msec., Comp. +2.0 and Canon EF500mm f/4L IS USM lens, has excellently captured these two, meaningfully relating to each other. Note their ragged, worn and faded tails and the holes in the female's primary wing feathers. Crows molt in the summertime when they shed old feathers to allow new growth, so these tail feathers were likely six-months old when this photo was taken in March.

Though crows are very smart tool users and advanced problem solvers, nonetheless humans hunt crows: permitted in Florida from May 10-January 19 on Saturdays and Sundays, no limit. The federal bird-banding office found, of 61 Fish Crow bands returned (1934-1997), 79% came from birds that had been shot.

Fish Crows are named not for their fishing expertise, but for living mainly along coastal and river waters eating carrion, crabs, marine invertebrates but primarily a predator of eggs of many bird and turtle species. They are also opportunistic omnivores eating seeds, berries, grapes, acorns, as well as picnic scraps and landfill waste. They are endemic to the United States living only along the eastern coasts and rivers whereas the American Crow occurs coast to coast and in Canada. Florida has more Fish Crows than anywhere else, because of our extensive coastline. The only reliable way to distinguish a Fish Crow from the American Crow is its more nasal voice. Ask a Fish Crow, "Are you an American Crow?" They will answer "unh-unh", not "caw, caw" as the American Crow would answer.

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



Fish Crow January 2014 © by Milton Heiberg

A visit up North by Linda Chancellor

It was February 9th, the temps were in the mid 20's and there were hills of plowed snow, three feet high, on every street corner so it seemed like a perfect day to visit the Aquarium in Mystic, Connecticut. I was glad I had put on thermal underwear because some of the best exhibits were outside. Here one could see the Beluga whales, the African Penguins and the sea lions. The recent snowfall that covered the plantings of hollies, junipers, and pines added to the feeling that you were in an Arctic setting. That day there were no crowds to block my view of the Belugas as they slowly swam in front of the large viewing windows. It was mesmerizing to watch these gentle giants, with their large snow white bodies, move effortlessly through the water. Often they would approach the glass and look at you with their unique facial features that made them appear to be smiling. I found myself unaware of time and cold.



Photo by Linda Chancellor

However, one eventually does feel the cold and so I waddled over to the Roger Tory Peterson Penguin Exhibit. This exhibit houses over twenty-eight African Penguins. Penguins have always amused me for what is not to like about watching birds that are large, stand still for pictures

and look dapper in tuxedo dress. African Penguins are also called Black footed Penguins or Jackass Penguins (because they bray). They inhabit the waters off of South Africa and stand about two feet tall. Identifying marks include a black face mask, a black line across their white chest, black webbed feet and black wings which are flattened into flippers. Each of the penguins, in the exhibit, was also wearing a colorful beaded bracelet around its wing. The different colored beads help the staff to identify each bird by the number in which it entered the colony and its sex. They

also use the colors of the beads to name each bird. While awkward on land penguins are extremely graceful in water. In the warmth of an underwater viewing room I observed the penguins as they darted at amazing speeds, through the water, releasing streams of tiny bubbles from their back feathers. I could have watched them for hours but I did not want to miss the Sea Lion show.

FYI: Scientists have recently discovered that by releasing trapped air as bubbles, from its feathers, penguins can double or triple their speed underwater.

Check out www.mysticaquarium.org/ to learn more about their Penguin Task Force, their research and their efforts to help with the conservation of the South African Penguins.

Kudos to our Indian River County Scrub-Jay Volunteers

The Florida Scrub-Jay, declared a threatened species by the USFWS in 1987, is found only in central Florida, is restricted to sand scrub habitat, and is federally protected under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. It is estimated the Florida Scrub-Jay has declined from 100,000 in the 1920s to 6000 to 7000, only a tiny fraction of its historic range. Most of the decline is a result of humans destroying Florida's scrub habitat (from groves, communities, highways, airfields, golf courses, to mines, power plants and industry). The habitat requires critical scrub-oaks (Scrub-Jays eat the acorns), cover (protection from hawks), and open sandy areas (for caching food). Traditionally to maintain such habitat, periodic lightning fires clear the ground cover and prevent sneak attacks by snakes on nests while also keeping the trees low so that predators cannot swoop down. Thus fire suppression together with human settlement further reduces usable habitat throughout the species' original range. Not only are the Scrub-Jays threatened, but also the plants and animals that share its scrub habitat.

We are very fortunate in Indian River County to have dedicated local Scrub-Jay volunteers.

As a part of Audubon's citizen science, volunteer **Joe Carroll**, formerly with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, **organized our JayWatch program**. He monitors (with help from the volunteers listed below) the Scrub-Jays at Indian River Club, South County Park, 65th Street, Vero Beach Airport and Wabasso Preserve. In 2006, **Joe Carroll** and Pelican Island Audubon decided to expand our monitoring of the threatened Florida Scrub-Jay population. The JayWatch volunteer program of The Nature Conservancy was expanding from the Lake Wales Ridge to a statewide count. Jay Watch offers a protocol for monitoring Florida Scrub-Jays, which requires fieldwork to be undertaken in late June and July so that the juvenile or newly fledged jays could be counted with their different plumage. This census period allowed the investigator to tell how successful each nesting season has been. These results when combined with other census efforts give

an idea of statewide population trends over time. The Nature Conservancy no longer is actively involved in the program, but by a joint effort of Audubon Florida, Archbold Biological Research station, and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and other supporters, it continues.

PIAS has been engaged in Jay Watch for 7 years now as a volunteer project. Board and chapter members, and even interested outsiders have spent time demonstrating to each participant a field, bird watching, biology oriented citizen science project. Three areas have been continuously monitored in central and southern Indian River County.



Others were followed for lesser periods since we are dependent on landowner's permission for access. One banded bird has been observed now for 6 seasons and was still present this past summer. Several of the sites being monitored would not likely be counted otherwise, since there is no one assigned to manage the properties for the Florida Scrub-Jay. This effort has continued

without chapter expenditures, just generous field time by the following volunteers: **Jenn Anselmo, Brian Barnett, Jackson Carroll, Joe Carroll, David Cox, Bill and Darlene Halliday, Julie Hanson, Gary Hickman, Nancy Irvin, Roz James, Tina Marchese, Faith Mitchell, Bob Montanaro, Beth Powell, Jane Schnee, Jim Shea, Peter Sutherland, Tim Towles, Jens Tripson, Beth Viviano, and Billi Wagner.**

Beth Powell, also the county's Conservation Lands Manager, and **Samantha McGee** of the St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park (SSRPSP) are paid staff, but they oversee and collect data to assess the success of habitat management efforts in the north county with the essential help of volunteers. At the SSRPSP, **Judy Elseroad and Jenn Anselmo, and Doug Sutherland** do surveys and conduct conditioning in preparation for trapping and banding the Jays for the 33 Scrub-Jay families each with their own territory.

Continued on next page

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: **Joe Carroll '14, David Cox, Ph.D. '14, Nancy Irvin '16, Bill Loftus, Ph.D. '15, John Orcutt, Ph.D. '15, Toni Robinson '16** — Appointed Board Members: **Graham Cox, Ph.D., Bill Halliday, Jim Kirley, Tina Marchese, David Peabody, Jane Schnee, (Billi Wagner - Ornithological Consultant)** 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.

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From 1997-2007 PIAS partnered with Pelican Island Elementary School Principal **Bonnie Swanson** to enable purchase of 18 Scrub-Jay habitat lots with a \$235,000 grant from the USFWS and donations that became the Pelican Island Audubon's Martha Winger Reflection Park adjacent to the School. **Beth Powell** also oversees with volunteers **Jane Schnee, Nancy Soucy, Jack Casselberry, Marion Conley, and Barbara Relva** the Jays in this Pelican Island Elementary School Preserve and at North Sebastian Conservation Area, Sebastian Airport & Golf Course, Sebastian Harbor Preserve, private properties at Bristol/Barber, Wabasso Scrub, 66th Avenue and Vero Lake Estates. These volunteers contribute many hours to watching, recording and trap training newly found and known birds. Each year, juveniles are monitored and trap trained in order to be able to color band them as well. They have banded 142 Jays in 14 years.

Today there are approximately 33 families outside SSRPSP with about 85% of them color banded for individual identification. In this way, each family's territory is recorded and mapped and how many juveniles are fledged from year to year. To date, we know that at least 10 Jays have dispersed into the St. Sebastian Preserve State Park through color band verification.

In addition, **Joe Carroll** and **Roz James** conduct monthly bird counts at Indian River Club Golf Course, which also has Scrub-Jays. From October to April members of the Club are invited to accompany them. **Roz James** and **Jackie O'Brien** also conduct bird counts monthly at Vero Beach Country Club.

To illustrate the life history of the Florida Scrub-Jay, Pelican Island Audubon Society office manager and wildlife photographer **Bob Montanaro** spent considerable time this past year under the guidance of wildlife biologist Joe Carroll waiting for opportunities to document Florida Scrub-Jay behavior through still photographs and digital video. "The Secret Life of the Florida Scrub-Jay" brings to life the often-elusive behavior of these birds and why the preservation of their habitat is one of the best ways to preserve the Florida Scrub-Jay along with the myriad other species that make the scrub their home. Hopefully it will educate the public about this unique and threatened bird and ways to protect it.

If you want to volunteer to be part of these teams, call our office 772-567-3520.

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 and a free gift cookbook!

- \$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 \$ _____

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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

Board Elections At our Vero Beach March 17th Annual Meeting, 7:00 pm, we will be electing two board members for a three year term. If you would like to be on our board or would like to nominate someone, please call our office, 772-567-3520. Nominations can also be made at our meeting March 17. The Nomination Committee is Dr. Bill Loftus, chair, Judy Orcutt, and Sharon Marable.