



The Pelican Island Audubon Society

Peligram

- founded in 1964 to serve Indian River County -

P.O. Box 1833, VERO BEACH, FL 32961 772-567-3520 Fax 772-567-3521 www.pelicanislandaudubon.org
Our 42nd Year Vol. 42 No. 8 November 2006

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

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

More information on all these events may be found at www.pelicanislandaudubon.org

Sat Nov 11 9:30am *Insects of Medical Importance in South Florida* with Dr. Roxanne Connelly, FMEL Boathouse, 150 9th St. S.E. (Oslo Road)

Sun Nov 12 – 8:00am–12:00pm ORCA canoe trip. Meet at the FMEL boathouse 200 9th St. S.E. (Oslo Road) east of U.S. 1. Reservations are required. Call 567-3520 to sign-up.

Wed Nov 15 – 7:30pm *Losing it all to sprawl: How progress ate my Cracker Landscape* with author/filmmaker Bill Belleville. North County Library, 1001 Sebastian Blvd, Sebastian.

Sat Nov 18 – 9 a.m.-1 p.m. *Sebastian Tree Clinic*, behind City Hall, 1225 Main St, Sebastian. See page 2 for details.

Mon Nov 20 – 7:30pm General Meeting at the Vero Beach Community Center, 2266 14th Ave. Topic: Scrub Jays with Dr. Ernest Cowan.

Wed Nov 29 – 2pm & 7pm *Journal of Light: A photographer's Search for the Soul of Florida* by John Moran, North County Library, 1001 Sebastian Blvd, Sebastian.

Sat Dec 2 – 8:30-10:00am Field Trip to St. Sebastian Preserve State Park led by Judy Elsroad to see Scrub-jays. Call 772-567-3520 for reservations and directions.

Sun Dec 3– 8:00am–12:00pm ORCA canoe trip. Meet at the FMEL boathouse 200 9th St. S.E. (Oslo Road) east of U.S. 1. Reservations are required. Call 567-3520 to sign-up.

Mon Dec 11 – 6:00pm Vegetarian Potluck & Holiday Bazaar at the Vero Beach Community Center, 2266 14th Ave.

Buy a copy today!

You can now purchase your copy of *Reflections of Blue Cypress* on our website using Visa or Mastercard! Visit us at pelicanislandaudubon.org to see how!!

CELEBRATING THE FLORIDA SCRUB-JAY!



GENERAL MEETING: NOVEMBER 20

The November 20th meeting of the Pelican Island Audubon Society at the Vero Beach Community Center, 2266 14th Ave., will feature Dr. Ernest Cowan of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. Dr. Cowan will discuss his latest research into the Scrub-jay population at the Savannas Preserve State Park in Port St. Lucie. The Florida Scrub-jay is the only bird species that is restricted entirely to Florida. They live only in xeric oak scrub communities and individuals rarely disperse more than a few kilometers from the area they were hatched. This sedentary behavior and site tenacity make the Florida Scrub-jay vulnerable to changes within the scrub community, such as a decline in the amount of suitable habitat. Due to these unique qualities, the Florida Scrub-jay has become a keystone species in the attempt to save what is left of the scrub habitat throughout Florida. Refreshments will be served following the program.

**SEE THE FLORIDA SCRUB-JAY
IN THE WILD!
SEE PAGE 2 FOR DETAILS →**

Pelican Island Audubon Society

Officers

President, **Richard H. Baker**
1st Vice President, **Lynne Larkin**
2nd Vice President, **Robert Adair**
Recording Sec., **Darlene Halliday**
Cor. Sec., **Deborah Ecker**
Treasurer, **Andrew Barr**

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Founding Member & President Emeritus Maggy Bowman
Office Manager **Bob Montanaro**

Pelican Island Audubon Society, Inc. is registered with the Florida Dept. of Agriculture and 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.

Special thanks go out to Melissa Tripson for her continuing work providing fresh-baked cookies for the monthly general meetings. The refreshments for the meetings are always a special treat and we look forward to them every month. Thank you, Melissa!

**LOOKING FOR CHAMPIONS! IS THERE A
CHAMPION TREE IN YOUR YARD?
FIND OUT AT
SEBASTIAN TREE CLINIC
NOVEMBER 18, 2006
BEHIND SEBASTIAN CITY HALL
1225 MAIN STREET, SEBASTIAN
9 a.m. to 1 p.m.**

- ◆ DEMONSTRATIONS
- ◆ SPEAKERS
Spencer Porteus
Andrea Coy
- ◆ WONDERFUL DOOR PRIZES!
- ◆ RECOGNITION OF SEBASTIAN'S
CHAMPION TREES!
- ◆ MASTER GARDENERS TO ANSWER YOUR
QUESTIONS
- ◆ REFRESHMENTS AVAILABLE courtesy of Pelican
Island Garden Club

**SPONSORED BY SEBASTIAN TREE & LANDSCAPE
ADVISORY BOARD AND THE
CITY OF SEBASTIAN**

RAIN DATE: NOV. 19 – NOON-5 P.M.

EARLY BIRD SPECIAL!

**TAKE A WALK WITH BETH POWELL AND MEET
THE SCRUB JAYS IN THE NATURE PRESERVE
7:30 - 8:45 A.M.**



DECEMBER 2, 2006 FLORIDA SCRUB-JAY FIELD TRIP

On Saturday, December 2, the Society will conduct a field trip led by Judy Elsrød at St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park to see a colony of Florida Scrub-jays that reside there. The hike begins at 8:30 a.m. and will end around 10:30 a.m. The hike will cover up to one mile through sugar-sand and scrub with little or no shade. Wear good shoes and a hat along with carrying water. Please call 772-567-3520 for reservations and directions. The Sebastian Tree Clinic will also conduct a walk to view Scrub-Jays. See the ad this page for details.

BUG TALK NOVEMBER 11

ORCA talks will begin this year on Saturday, **November 11, at 9:30am** in the Boathouse of the Florida Medical Entomology

Lab. Dr. Roxanne Connelly (formerly Rutledge), the FMEL Extension Entomologist, will be the featured speaker. Her topic, much requested by the volunteers, will be *Insects of Medical Importance in South Florida*.

Another title for this talk might be: *What's Biting Me? Or, How Can I Protect Myself?* Think not only mosquitoes & sand flies but fire ants, spiders & such. Please feel free to bring insect specimens for id -- and lots of questions. Hope to see you there for an excellent speaker & important topic.



VEGETARIAN POTLUCK & HOLIDAY BAZAAR, DECEMBER 11

Don't miss the Vegetarian Potluck & Holiday Bazaar on December 11 starting at 6:00 p.m. at the Vero Beach Community Center, 2266 14th Avenue. We ask that those attending bring a vegetarian dish that will serve eight people. All those attending should, also, bring their own place setting. A variety of beverages will be provided.

Serious Problem in Indian River County...We Must Save Our Scrub-jays from Extinction!

Florida scrub-jays, the only bird species unique to Florida and keystone species of fire-dependent xeric oak scrub, have been in a steady decline; 90% of the original populations are gone due to the loss of habitat for agriculture and urban development and also due to degrading of habitat from the suppression of natural fires. Like our bald eagle, scrub-jays are listed as a threatened species by both federal and state agencies. To rectify this decline, some scrub habitats have been preserved and managed (although not enough) to protect this species and the other species found only in scrub. Large areas are needed as each scrub-jay family group, two breeders and up to six helpers, defends approximately 13-25 acres of land.



The President's Hoot!

On November 20th, Ernest M. Cowan, will be speaking about the plight of the scrub jay populations at the Savannas Preserve State Park in St. Lucie County, where their numbers remained stable from 1996-1999, but have been steadily declining since then from 41 individuals to 28 individuals in 2003, a 33% decline over the 8-year period. He finds predation by natural and urban related animals are part of the problem. His study revealed that scrub jays are occupying territories that are much smaller than the normal optimal size and are having minimal reproductive success. In addition, the birds are subjected to predation pressures from natural predators present at higher than normal densities and by other predators, such as feral cats and dogs, brought into their habitat by encroaching urban development.

The largest scrub habitat in Indian River County is the St. Sebastian River Preserve State Park with 21,748.42 acres (33 square miles), which is shared with Brevard County. This park is home to the fourth largest scrub-jay metapopulation in Florida. Although now, according to Judy Elseroad, scrub-jay populations drastically decreased by 52 to 63 % in the last two years due to "catch-up" restoration fires, the Preserve is now at a point where future proscribed fires where no single territory will be completely burned at one time, leaving the majority of the area in optimum condition. Hopefully, the population will now rebound. Judy will also be leading our Dec 2nd field trip to the preserve (See page 2) to see the jays and the efforts being made there to protect the remaining population, including further habitat restoration.

Indian River County has purchased other areas to preserve and protect scrub-jays. As a result of studies from 1991 through 1998 of banded scrub-jays within the Sebastian Highlands that showed 54% decline from 35 breeding pairs to 16 breeding pairs, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) stopped all development in the Highlands until Indian River County and the City of Sebastian requested a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and received an Incidental Take Permit for the purpose of maintaining 13 to 14 scrub-jay families in the Sebastian area. Beth Powell, County Environmental Lands Manager, has had many of these individuals in the Highlands banded and indicated that some of these families are producing young. Nevertheless, Sebastian still needs to stop allowing land clearing during the nesting season in areas where we know there are jays. In addition the City should install traffic calming devices near the Pelican Island Elementary School preserve, ENFORCE the leash law, and change the landscaping ordinance so that perch trees won't be planted next to jay preserves.

The good news is that there are other scrub-jay populations in our county (i.e. the winter beach site on Old Dixie and 65th St., Sebastian Preserve near Engler and Easy Streets, and other sites in mid, southern and western county). However, little attention is given to these areas, which are at the greatest risk and may be very critical to the continuation of the scrub-jay populations in Indian River County. The county, however, can think comprehensively about its endangered species protection and develop its own comprehensive Habitat Conservation Plan. This would require the county to identify areas with listed species and areas to conserve. If done correctly, it can be a major win-win:

1. The mitigation cost can be spread out or shared by everyone (reduced mitigation cost)
2. Once the incidental take permit is issued, the process is expedited for the homeowner and the developer because the USFWS is out of the loop (provided that the development is consistent with the plan)
3. The mitigation stays in the county instead of going to Brevard County
4. It gives the county more control (provided they issue permits consistent with the agreements in the HCP- then they don't need to consult with the USFWS).

So there is hope for our scrub-jays- What needs to be done?

What our county can do.

1. Conduct a countywide survey of all scrub jay habitats to determine the presence of scrub-jay families and monitor them every five years.

Continued on page 4→

Pelican Island Audubon Society
P.O. Box 1833
Vero Beach, FL 32961-1833

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**THE PRESIDENT'S HOOT
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3**

2. Band all family members to determine population levels over time.
3. Enforce the leash law for all cats. All feral and domestic cats found outside without a leash should be taken to the Humane Society.
4. Provide a county-wide HCP to protect our remaining scrub-jays.
5. Give micro incentives such as tax reductions to private land owners who manage their lands for the benefit of scrub-jays in their area. Reduce your property tax if you have scrub-jay families on your land or lots.
6. Purchase additional scrub-jay habitat, fee simple or conservation easements, with county environmental land bond funds.

What You can do. You can help!

1. The Nature Conservancy has created the *Jay Watch* program using volunteers to count scrub-jays on conservation sites. Volunteers attend training sessions where they learn about jays, their habitat, and how to observe and track them. Beth Powell is interested in organizing *Jay Watch* in our county. If you are interested, please call 567-3520 or email piaudubon@bellsouth.net our office or Beth Powell directly at 589-9223 or bpowell@ircgov.com.
2. Email your County Commissioners:
Sandra Bowden sbowden@ircgov.com
Gary Wheeler gwheeler@ircgov.com
Wesley Davis wdavis@ircgov.com
Peter O'Bryan pobryan@ircgov.com
Joe Flescher jflescher@ircgov.com or call them at 567-8000 ext 1490 and tell them you want the county to protect our scrub-jays (see above).
3. Encourage legislators to change the designation of scrub jays from "threatened" to "endangered"
4. Talk to your neighbors and friends to support proscribed fires, as the inconvenience of smoke and fire is minor compared to the drop in all animal & bird populations in overgrown areas. It may also help preserve your home.

Come Monday Nov 20th evening to learn from the expert what else we can do about other things that might be causing the population to drastically disappear as they are!

Richard Baker, President

**BECOME A MEMBER OF THE
PELICAN ISLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY**

Membership benefits include subscriptions to *Audubon* magazine, *Florida Naturalist*, and the PIAS newsletter *The Peligram*. Additionally, members have full borrowing privileges to the PIAS nature library and much more!

- \$20 one-year membership
 Donation \$ _____
 \$20 Friend (receive *The Peligram* only)
 Check box if a *MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL*.

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