



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

Our 50th Year Vol. 50 No. 6 September 2014

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

The beautiful mosquitoes of Florida (and the somewhat attractive birds that they bite)

Sept. 15, 2014 - Vero Beach Community Center - 2266 14th Avenue, Vero Beach - 7:30 PM

If you've never looked at a mosquito up close, you probably don't know how beautiful (yes, this is not a typo) they are. There are roughly 80 different species of mosquitoes in Florida, and they are as diverse and colorful as the animals that they feed upon. It's no secret that mosquitoes bite people, but you may be surprised to know that mosquitoes also bite birds, snakes, alligators, shrews, frogs and even fish! While this may seem like a mere interesting tidbit, the fact that mosquitoes feed upon such a wide array of animals is important for your health. Mosquitoes that bite birds are especially important, because some birds are hosts for viruses, such as West Nile virus, that can kill. Mosquitoes that feed upon virus-infected birds and then later feed upon a person can infect them. But which birds are good hosts for each virus? Are the good host birds fed upon by the mosquitoes that carry the virus? Are those birds avoided? Why would one species be avoided and another bitten? Come find out!

Nathan D. Burkett-Cadena, PhD, is Assistant Professor of Entomology at the University of Florida, Florida Medical Entomology Laboratory, in Vero Beach. He is co-author of over 30 scientific research articles and the new book *Mosquitoes of the Southeastern United States* (2013), from University of Alabama Press. He is an avid photographer and naturalist. Dr. Burkett-Cadena obtained his M.S. and PhD degrees from Auburn University, studying mosquitoes that transmit West Nile virus and eastern equine encephalitis virus in Alabama. His postdoctoral research position at the University of South Florida (Tampa) took him to Burkina Faso (West Africa) and Chiapas, Mexico to develop a trap for the flies that transmit river blindness. He is a native of Mobile County, Alabama, and has been living with his wife, Marleny, and son, Daniel, in Florida since 2010. <http://www.amazon.com/Mosquitoes-Southeastern-United-States-Burkett-Cadena/dp/0817317813>

Member's Contact Information

We are excited about the upcoming, new chapter in Pelican Island Audubon Society's 50-year history. As we anticipate the completion of our Audubon House, our board has been actively developing new programs and activities for our members and the community. If anyone has any ideas or suggestions regarding activities that they would like us to offer, at Audubon House, please let us know. As we enter this new chapter we would like to incorporate a more efficient way to contact our members about upcoming PIAS events and issues regarding Indian River County. To do this we are asking our members to provide us with their e-mail address and current phone number. This information is for PIAS use only and will not be shared. We hope you will provide us with this information to better inform you. Please either e-mail information to PIAS at: piaudubon@bellsouth.net or call the office at 772-567-3520. Thank you in advance for your help.

Florida's Water and Land Conservation Amendment

**VOTE
YES ON 1**

NOVEMBER 4, 2014

www.VoteYesOn1FL.org

Pd. pol. adv. paid for and sponsored by Florida's Water and Land Legacy, Inc., 1700 N. Monroe St., Ste. 11-286, Tallahassee, FL 32303

Masthead photo: Osprey by Bob Montanaro.

Bird of the Month *by Juanita Baker*

Yummy! Afternoon Snack!

Cattle Egret - *Bubulcus ibis* Order CICONIIFORMES – Family ARDEIDAE

How proud this Cattle Egret looks, having caught this huge grasshopper! Their stomach contents consist of about 30% orthoptera (grasshoppers, crickets, katydids, and locusts) and about 60% horseflies. Around our cattle pastures, you may have seen small white egrets next to the cattle, or even standing on top of them. Their gawky, head-pumping walk, short legs and chunky neck compared to the sleeker appearance of other white egrets distinguish it as a Cattle Egret. Notice them foraging behind tractors or near the grazing cow's head or front feet; where tasty insects are first stirred up. Because Cattle Egrets reduce the need for costly pesticides, knowledgeable cattle ranchers respect them.

Doesn't this Cattle Egret look beautiful with its tawny breeding head plumes, bright orange-red bill with purple facial skin and bright red irises? Karen Schuster photographed it with her Canon 50 f/5.6, 1/250 sec, ISO 100, 200 mm lens in April at the height of the breeding season. Their colorful plumage lasts only a few months, after which they molt into mostly all white feathers, all yellow bill and legs. Some birds become stained green or brown by feeding in mowed grass. Northern populations migrate to warmer climes in Nov-Feb, adding numbers to our Florida resident Cattle Egrets.



Photo Credits/Title: Cattle Egret © Karen Schuster, Pelican Island Audubon & Indian River Photo Club

Originally from Africa and tropical Asia, Cattle Egrets have exhibited phenomenal dispersal to all parts of the world, the greatest natural expansion recorded for any bird. They have thrived on grassland creation by humans. First recorded in Surinam, South America in 1877, this long distant flyer evidently crossed the Atlantic Ocean from Africa. Their first record of arriving in Florida was not until 1941, but since then, it has spread north to Newfoundland, across the US to California, and even to Alaska by the 1970s. Breeding has been confirmed in all but four of our contiguous states.

What's up???

Crested Caracara *Caracara cheriway* Order FALCONIFORMES - Family FALCONIDAE

While two biologists were checking the status of a known nest tree, State Biologist Tim Towles confirmed the presence of Crested Caracara nestlings with his Canon PowerShot SX50x Stabilized 24-1200 mm Zoom lens. Because nests with repeated human visitation often fail, they stayed 90 feet away and minimized the time spent in the area to avoid disturbing the nestlings or parents. In some situations, such as using a vehicle as a blind, or at parks with boardwalks and railings, birds tolerate humans closer than in the wild.

One of our prized Florida birds, the resident Crested Caracara, nests only in central Florida, southern Texas, and Arizona in the U.S. but though it does not migrate, its range is south to the Amazon, and is the national bird of Mexico. A related Caracara inhabits Southern South America. Conversion of ranches to citrus, sugar or subdivisions led to habitat loss and earned this species its federally Threatened status in 1987. Caracaras do not soar on thermals, swoop down from telephone wires or perch when hunting. Instead, Caracaras usually hunt early or late in the day by walking in open pastures, flying low along the ground or just above the treetops, foraging for mammals (31%), reptiles (24%), wade into shallow ponds after fish (24%), birds (13%) and amphibians (7%); 33% of these were scavenged from road kills.

While other falcons use old nests of other birds, Caracaras collect materials to construct or refurbish their own nest. They prefer to build nests in cabbage palms getting a commanding view of their surroundings. Amongst the fronds, see two curious heads poking up from the cabbage-palm nest. In 7 weeks, no longer downy, these chicks will be clambering about the branches and nest. At 2 months, the fledglings (88% of adult size) will join other youngsters and nonbreeding adults gregariously prospecting for food up to 35 miles away, but eventually return to their natal area. Caracaras roost communally all vocalizing loudly; their name derived from the Guarani Indian word descriptive of their unique rattling sound.



Photo Title: Crested Caracara by Tim Towles, Pelican Island Audubon, and State Biologist, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

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

Two Great Opportunities to Help!



First- Our Audubon House. We have come a long way with our Audubon House construction. From the photographs see how far! If you would like to come to see the work in progress, call me at 772-567-3520 to arrange for an informal tour. We will have a grand opening when done!

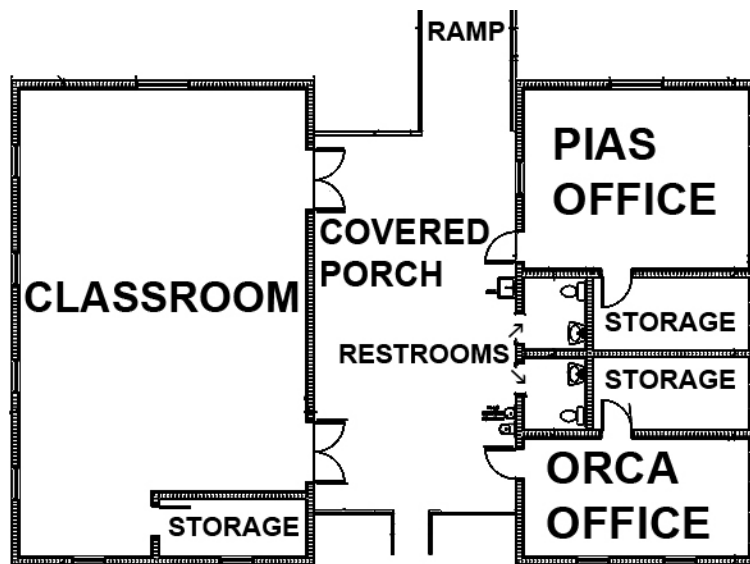
Audubon House will be a gateway to nature, our first real office and activity center in 50 years of service to the community. Our center will allow us to train volunteer environmental stewards for nearly 10,000 acres of county conservation lands and work with the community to reduce pollution in our Lagoon and rivers.

This vital new resource for environmental outreach and education efforts is located on Oslo Road (195 9th St. SE), next to the University of Florida Medical Entomology Laboratory and surrounded by the Oslo Riverfront Conservation Area, (ORCA), 440 acres of different habitats.

Audubon House will provide many opportunities for you to give your ideas, advocate for the Lagoon, and help with citizen science like monitoring birds (through the Christmas bird count, Eagle Watch, Jay Watch, Blue Cypress osprey nest count, and other programs); assist with Boy Scout merit badges and square foot gardens; help define indicators of social, economic, and environmental quality; plant trees; lead field trips, and suggest and enjoy program speakers. Now, with your help, we have a real center in which to meet and to run school and adult environmental education programs and activities including birding classes, attracting birds to back yards, turning lawns into diverse habitats and creating but-

terfly gardens.

Progress: Audubon House's novel design of two 'bird houses' joined together and turned into classroom and meeting space will allow us to do so much more to teach about and protect the Indian River County land, water and wildlife we love so much. These dynamic programs will be directed from a small area for offices including space for ORCA volunteers.



Still to finish: interior and exterior painting, installing insulation and doors, finishing the parking lot, and putting in our native plant and butterfly gardens. Also furnishings: install computer equipment, projector and large-size screen, desks, tables and chairs; everything that will make our classroom a living, breathing learning center, and teaching space for 50-70 people.

Audubon has received much community support to build the center. When we started this project campaign in 2007 we raised \$212,903. In addition, local businesses

provided \$175,000 in in-kind services. But the land purchase and increases in building and material expenses were unanticipated. The current estimate to finish the building is another \$100,000. Our July 2014 appeal thankfully brought in \$34,460 from 88 generous members, which was matched by **an anonymous donor who will continue to match dollar for dollar up to \$60,000.** Those who have not yet donated, **please help complete our new education building!** Every single contribution, no matter how modest, makes a real difference, and we very much welcome gifts made to honor the memories of your loved ones.

Continued ⇨

Two Great Opportunities to Help!



Audubon House Classroom under construction.



PIAS office under construction.

YES, I will support this vision!

NAME _____

EMAIL _____

PHONE _____

I am enclosing my tax-deductible gift to PIAS for supporting Audubon House:

\$100 \$250 \$500 \$1,000 \$2,500 \$5,000

I am sending a check to Pelican Island Audubon Society, P.O. Box 1833, Vero Beach, FL 32961

I am using PayPal at <http://www.pelicanislandaudubon.org/donate.html>

Second- STOP the Dredging of Sea Grasses at Oslo.

Judge D.R. Alexander, presiding at our recent Oslo boat ramp administrative hearing, ruled against our petition. He believes you can mitigate anything, even when clear evidence from Dr. Grant Gilmore, foremost Ichthyologist (fish scientist) on the Indian River Lagoon, told him that Spotted Seatrout, Red Drum, Snook, and Tarpon are very particular about their spawning and nursery grounds. Larvae of all those species need specific habitats before developing into the fish we catch and eat. Only a few places in the Lagoon meet those needs even when there are lush seagrass and mangroves elsewhere. The fish recognize those areas even if humans cannot. For reasons unknown to science, these fish have chosen just this spot, as Dr. Gilmore calls it, a "fishery gold mine around Oslo Road!" .

There are some areas that just need to be conserved.

Period. And this is one of them. We humans have altered the great majority of our county's natural habitat in the pursuit of progress. ORCA is one precious area to preserve in Florida.

Fortunately, the Florida Inland Navigation District (FIND) decided not to fund the million-dollar project, but County

Commissioner O'Bryan was reported saying he'd use taxpayer's funds! While the Judge did not get it, FIND commissioners realized that this harmful, costly dredge and fill project neither helps our Lagoon recovery nor supports our fishing, shellfish, and tourist industries, our bird, manatee, dolphin, and fish populations, our kids' future, or our economy.

What can you do to protect this world-class habitat?

Help keep this issue before the county commission with phone calls, letters or appearances before the County Commission. For excellent background info, underwater videos, sample talking points and letters, and where to write, please visit the PIAS website: www.PelicanIslandAudubon.org

I have run out of reasons why the county commission is doing this!!! If you know or want to help us stop this, please call me at 772-567-3520. We'll also be launching a petition shortly, so please stay tuned.

Thank you,

Richard H. Baker

July Bird of the Month

Landing Gear

Roseate Spoonbill *Platalea ajaja* Order CICONIIFORMES – Family THRESKIORNITHIDAE

As this Roseate Spoonbill's landing gear is extended and about to touch down, all its marvelous feather-pattern markings are visible...the intense scarlet upper wing and tail, the body plumage brighter pink, while the upper breast, neck, and back are white, and with yellow shoulder patch. Only slightly visible are the recurved scarlet feathers on the upper breast just below the neck. The red legs and eye coloring are still intensely red as in breeding season; however, the unfeathered, pale-green head has faded and lacks the defining black headband (seen here as pale gray). Orange markings beneath the eye that are more intense during breeding (January-April) are now paler.



Photo Credits/Title: Landing Gear: Roseate Spoonbill © 2014 Jennifer Lanam

How difficult it is to take a photo like this, at this exact moment of extended wings, in such focus, patiently being positioned in the right spot, sunlight sufficient, observing carefully the bird's pattern of behavior and catching it within the frame. Photographer Jennifer Lanam was aided by her Canon T3i camera, f/5.6, 1/800s, ISO 100, 55-250mm @ 250 mm lens. She took it in May following the breeding season at the TM Goodman Waterfowl Management Area northwest of Fellsmere. Roseate Spoonbills have discovered an island adjacent to the north section of the parking lot, where their eggs and young in nests within dense shrubs, remain undisturbed and safe. Primary predators (raccoons, humans) are deterred by surrounding alligator-infested waters.

Shallow pools attract wading Spoonbills to feed, swinging their heads back and forth, its flattened spoon-shaped bill slightly open and ready to snap shut when small sensors contact prey: mainly fishes and aquatic invertebrates. Very gregarious, the Spoonbills nest, feed and roost together in our wetland habitats. How wonderful Florida wetlands are for observing such uniquely beautiful birds!

Adaptation by Linda Chancellor

Several years ago a wooden platform had been added to the top of the red channel marker. It attracted the interest of a pair of ospreys who approved of the location and proceeded to gather sticks to build a nest. The nest that year was very sparse but they successfully raised one chick. The next summer they returned and I watched as they brought more sticks and material to the nest. One of the ospreys flew toward a nearby tall tree that had a number of large dead limbs near the top. His legs swung forward and with talons open he grabbed one of the dead branches. I heard a loud crack as the branch broke free. He continued in flight with the branch that was as long as his six foot wing span. He began to lose altitude. I thought that the branch was too large or heavy and that he would have to drop it. He began to fly in large circles and with each circle he managed to gain some height. Finally with his talons still firmly fixed around the branch he flew towards the platform. The branch was received by the female and added to the other sticks on the platform.

The nest was larger than the year before but still small and barely covered the width of the platform. It was a



good location as the creek was quiet and received little boat traffic but that changed last summer. In previous years the few smaller, slower boats including the twice weekly crabbing boat gave a wide berth to the nest.

Last summer several jet skiers came to the cove. The jet skiers would roar up and down the creek with their rooster-tail plumes of water. The female would fly off of the nest, circle, and then come back after they left. In spite of this disturbance one chick was raised that summer. I wondered if the ospreys would return next year. I remembered the saying that desirable real estate is based on "location, location, location". Available nesting opportunities are the same and this particular one had a lot of good points especially being over open water where few predators could bother the chicks.

This summer the ospreys did return and added a few more branches to the nest. The female was less skittish and did not leave the nest as often when the jet skis came close. By early July, I was able to spot with my binoculars, two good size chicks in the nest.

FYI - Ospreys and Owls are the only raptors with a reversible outer toe. This allows them to have two toes facing forward and two behind when they need to grasp objects such as prey or a "desirable" branch.

Volunteers Needed

We were thinking 3 shifts, 9:00-11:30 am, 11:30-2:00 pm, and 2:00-4:30 pm. We would like to have 3-4 people per shift, more the merrier. It's always a fun day, meeting with people and watching the kids play the games. If you would like to help out, even if it is just for an hour or so, please either contact the PIAS office @772-567-3520 or leave a message for Darlene @772-569-9148. Thank you.

PIAS will be participating in the Cultural Council's Celebrate the Arts Event, at Riverside Park, in Vero Beach, on Saturday, September 27th. We will have a booth at the event as well as a few games.

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**, **Jim Kirley**, **Tina Marchese**, **David Peabody**, and **Jane Schnee**

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 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 \$ _____

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
Silvery & Silky But Not a Grass

Common names for plants can be confusing. Narrowleaf silkgrass (*Pityopsis graminifolia*) is silky, but it is not a grass.

Silvery grass-like leaves adorn this sun-loving, low-growing plant that is a member of the daisy family (Asteraceae). In the late summer, fall, and sometimes early winter, dime- or nickel-sized bright yellow “daisies” bloom on the tips of its flower stalks.

During the rest of the year, you might believe that this plant is a grass due to its 12 to 18” tall narrow leaves that give rise to its species name, *graminifolia*. *Folia*, as you can easily guess, means leaves or foliage, and *gramini* means grass. Gramineae once was the given name of the grass family (now it is Poaceae). The genus, *Pityopsis*, refers for its resemblance to pine.

Its silvery blue-green leaves are covered with scattered hairs and are quite showy. Narrowleaf silkgrass, with its distinctive color and texture, makes an excellent groundcover for sunny, dry places. Native to sandy, open areas in the southeastern U.S., this plant is very drought-tolerant and tough. It grows vigorously and will form small mat in open spaces. You can see this plant thriving at the Oslo Riverfront Conservation Area on the south side of the Oslo Road where roller-chopping has created new open, sunny spots.

Narrowleaf silkgrass is a favored food of gopher tortoises. Pollinators nectar on its yellow flowers, and seed-eating birds forage on its achenes (dry fruits). This native plant deserves wider use in landscaping for its attractiveness, drought tolerance, and wildlife value.



Photos by Janice Broda.