

### Peligram

May 2023



White messenger at Fisheating Creek - Leucistic Turkey Vulture on snag with Tillandsia air plants © Ricky Ray

by Juanita N. Baker, Ph.D.

How unique! Such an amazing pose with 6-foot white wings outstretched. However, notice the two brown feathers on each wing between the primary and the secondary feathers. Thus, this is a rare leucistic bird, meaning some pigmentation, not even a rarer albino with no pigmentation. Notice, there is also a brown color of the skin on the head and neck feathers, and its beak and legs are white, thus a bird exhibiting **leucism** (partial loss of pigmentation). Turkey Vultures (TVs) are usually black with grey on the underside of the primary and secondary feathers, but in addition to the prominent brown feathers, note also there are tinges of brown on some of the back feathers and the base of the tail feathers.

Leucism happens when a bird is developing (genetically or first feathers in the young bird). The enzyme tyrosinase does not transfer one of the melanin pigments, eumelanin (black, gray colors) to the feathers as they formed. Interestingly, the two unique brown feathers between the primary and secondary feathers are the only feathers in the whole body that are brown. This means the second melanin pigment, pheomelanin (red to dark brown, and at lower concentrations, yellow color) still operated to give color. All vultures must have the pheomelanin in these key feathers and lightly on some other feathers as indicated by this unusual leucistic bird. The pigments add strength to feathers. Turkey Vultures surely need strong feathers as they float up the thermals allowing them to soar to four miles high. Doing so, they can travel long distances with little energy expenditure. Turkey Vultures are the most frequent bird hit by airplanes, but jets at their usual cruising altitude of 6-8 miles high are less likely to hit a vulture.

In the Americas, Turkey Vultures are the most widely distributed Vulture with three subspecies. These scavengers eat carrion from Canada down to all of South America. Adding to our year-round Turkey Vulture Florida resident population are slightly larger migrants that breed in Northern and eastern U.S. states and Canada. They migrate south primarily between October-March.

Turkey Vultures are renowned for their keen sense of smell (their brain's olfactory bulb is one of the largest of our birds) to detect hidden carrion, (not fresh, but one-day-old carrion) from a mile away. Black Vultures, lacking that sense, follow Turkey Vultures to locate food sources. Natural-gas companies introduced mercaptan, a carrion-like odorant, into their pipelines and identified pipeline leaks where the Turkey Vultures circled overhead! This creative use gives us another reason we need to save our birds, even the ones that eat carrion!

### **References:**

van Grouw, Hein. (2006). Not every white bird is an albino: Sense and nonsense about colour aberrations in birds. Dutch Birding 28: 79-89

Kirk, D. A. and M. J. Mossman (2020, text last updated January 1, 1998). Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*), version 1.0. In Birds of the World (A. F. Poole and F. B. Gill, Editors). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.turvul.01

### Submit your photos to the Birds Need Plants Photo Contest Visit PelicanIslandAudubon.org for all the details.



Our Mission: To preserve and protect the animals, plants, and natural communities, and the land and water on which they depend in Indian River County through education, advocacy, and public awareness.

### **Officers & Directors**

### **Officers**

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Executive Director Donna Halleran

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Audubon House

195 9th Street SE (Oslo Rd.), Vero Beach M - F | 9AM - 1PM

**Mailing Address:** 

P.O. Box 1833, Vero Beach, FL 32961 **Phone:** 772-567-3520

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www.PelicanIslandAudubon.org



### Saving Gopher Tortoises in Indian River County

Richard H. Baket, a

Have you seen a Gopher Tortoise? The sand ridge west of US1 on which we build our railroad and our homes was prime land for multitudinous Gopher tortoises. They were plentiful and survived many palmetto/pine forest fires safely deep in their burrows.

Because their habitat is sandy scrub and upland pine forest, which is also the prime human-development habitat, their numbers are declining. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) lists them as a threatened species, and it is a criminal violation to kill one. Both the tortoise and its burrows are protected under State Law, Chapter 68A-27.003 of the Florida Administrative Code. They must be relocated before any land clearing or development takes place, and property owners must obtain permits

from the FWC before capturing and relocating them.

Gopher tortoises (*Gopherus polyphemus*) are known as a Florida keystone species because of the impressive burrows they dig for themselves, like mammalian gophers. What makes them an extremely critical species is that these burrows provide a home and shelter for at least 360 other animal species, including frogs, snakes, small invertebrates and burrowing owls, which are also a threatened species by the FWC, that depend on them to provide a safe place https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gopher\_tortoise. Amazingly, they can live at least 40 years. One was 100 years old in 2022!. The burrows they dig are, on average, 15 ft. long and up to 6.6 ft. deep. They eat over 300 species of plants, thus requiring about 4 acres for each gopher tortoise. They prefer to live alone but the sexes get together during the mating season from February to September, peaking in May and June. Females on occasion have female "visitors." Gopher tortoise males mature in 9-12 years, while females take from

10-21 years. After mating, she lays from 3-14 eggs in nests in the sand near the burrow. Ninety percent of the nests are destroyed by armadillos, raccoons, foxes, with alligators even eating the eggs. As with many reptiles, the sex of the embryos is determined by the sand temperature where they are incubated. If the sand is over 30°C, it will be a male.

During the Great Depression, they were called "Hoover chicken" and were common on Florida dinner tables. The Smithsonian magazine had a recipe for gopher-tortoise stew in an article called "Recipes from Another Time" https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/os-xpm-2004-02-10-0402100241-story.html.

Details for Florida's gopher tortoises in Indian River Country (IRC) can be found at <a href="https://www.ircgov.com/departments/General\_Services/Parks/Conservation/documents/Gopher\_Toroises.pdf">https://www.ircgov.com/departments/General\_Services/Parks/Conservation/documents/Gopher\_Toroises.pdf</a>. Recently, Joann McGath made a great



presentation about the gopher tortoises in IRC to the IRC Commission on Jan. 31, 2023, https://ircgov.granicus.com/player/clip/810?meta\_id=175273. Gopher tortoise mortality rates must be rising because IRC only requires a Land clearing Permit and complete Environmental Assessment Report that includes Gopher Tortoise Survey and habitat suitability on development sites over 1 acre. In addition, relocating tortoises to already occupied areas may soothe human consciences, but tortoises require 4 acres to survive and sites are likely occupied already. Thus, there are many sites of less than an acre that could have gopher tortoises on them that are not protected. from which gopher tortoises will not be relocated before any development takes place. They are buried in their holes or will likely starve on expansive grassy lawns! Thus, IRC needs to hire an additional staff member to assess the presence of gopher tortoises on lands less than 1 acre. Further, IRC should provide more county land for gopher tortoise sanctuaries in accordance with the FWC-approved Gopher Tortoise Management Plan approved in 2007. The public, especially new landowners, need to be informed of their responsibilities to protect and safely relocate gopher tortoises from their land by contacting an authorized Gopher Tortoise Agent (www.myfwc.com/gophertortoise).

Many thanks to Joann McGrath who has formed a new group of concerned folks to protect the gopher tortoises in our county-"Gopher Tortoise Alliance-Gopher it!" Their Mission is "To protect and preserve Gopher Tortoises and their habitat through education, advocacy, and responsible environmental stewardship." Gopher Tortoise Alliance vision is to create a model for other counties in our State.

They are also concerned with the clear-cutting of all trees on lots and hope to protect the largest trees and keep some habitat to protect native species. Let's build our houses around the trees and keep more natural habits, or our native species of not only tortoises, but insects, pollinators, birds, and all wildlife will die. The Alliance-Gopher it! will be working with the county and cities to increase tortoise and habitat protection.

We appreciate those of you who stop safely to help a gopher tortoise cross the road, preventing it from being killed or injured. Think of how many other animals you are also helping!

## Upoming Meetings The Benefits of Prescribed Fire & Florida's Ecosystems

May 8, 2028
Starting at
6:00PM
North County
Library, 1001
Sebastian
Boulevard (GR
512), Sebastian

with Miguel Nevarez, wildfire Mitigation Specialist, Florida Forest Service

Prescribed fitre is an essential tool for Florida's ecosystems for wildfitre reduction and land management. Learn about the importance of prescribed burns and why they are done.



### More than fish by Linda Chancellor

Bass Pro Shop in Palm Bay was our destination. I wanted to see their 16,000 gallon indoor aquarium that held native freshwater fish. As we approached the wooden bridge leading to the Florida

Style Cracker storefront I saw a woman, off to my left, taking pictures. What could be so interesting? She was taking pictures of live alligators! Many were sunning themselves but a few lay in the waterway that meandered through the enclosure. There were at least a dozen of the largest alligators I had ever seen and all of them looked very well fed! On the other side of the bridge was another enclosure where I saw three very large wild hogs. I have seen many alligator exhibits but never an exhibit with wild hogs and certainly not this close up. Two of them were near the fence rooting with their snouts in

the shallow muddy area. One hog had dark stiff hair and the one closest to me had off white hair. I looked at its face. I certainly would not have considered it a pretty face but then I noticed its eyelashes. They were long and lush like false eyelashes. These

Lagoon-friendly
Landscaping

with Emily Surmont, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Office of Resilience and Coastal Protection, Indian River Lagoon Aquatic Preserves May 22, 2023
Starting at
7:00PM
Vero Beach
Community
Center
2266 14th
Avenue, Vero
Beach



animals certainly didn't look threatening but I had heard that, in the wild, they could be very aggressive. When we returned home I searched Google to find information about wild hogs. I found several websites with details about them but there was also one that reported that Donny, the 350 lb. hog residing at the

Bass Pro Shop, had undergone emergency surgery for a urinary blockage. The surgery was done in 2016 at the UF Large Animal Hospital. The wild hog had developed gall stones. They suspected that the stones may have developed from the additional feeding of kale and spinach, which are high in calcium, to their nutritional approved diet.

FYI- In Florida wild hogs are also called feral hogs, wild boar or piney woods rooter. They are thought to be the descendants of swine brought here in 1539 by the Spanish explorer Hernando DeSoto. Their

populations have exploded and are now found in all 67 counties in Florida and are declared an invasive species. Their habit of rooting to find food causes millions of damage to farms, pastures, natural areas and even homeowners lawns and gardens.



### Audubon Advocates Monthly Update: Bloodsuckers, Scrub Habitat, and the Water Cycle

by Lauren Reeves, Environmental Educator

Our Advocates were visited by Dr. Nathan Burkett-Cadena, professor of entomology at the Florida Medical Entomology Laboratory, who taught them all about the importance of mosquitoes

### Bloodsuckers by Errionna from Glendale Elementary

Today's lesson was about bloodsuckers like mosquitoes etc. We learned the words "entomologist," "exoskeleton," and "life cycle." The word "entomologist" means a scientist who studies insects. Another word we learned is "exoskeleton," which is an external skeleton that supports and protects an animal's body. This last word is the most important word—the word is "life cycle." It means the series of changes in the life of an organism, including reproduction and death. My favorite part

Environmental of this lesson was when we used the microscopes to look at mosquito larvae.

Later in the month, our Advocates had a field trip to Indrio Savannahs preserve, where they learned about the habitats that depend on forest fires. Some of our coolest wildlife encounters from that week included scrub jays, gopher tortoises, and



### Keeshlor from Citrus Elementary said,

"My favorite thing about today was how we saw Scrub Jays and learned meanings of words like prescribed burn which means a fire started and managed to keep a forest healthy. We also took pictures."

### Jesus from Citrus Elementary said,

"Scrub Jays need fire so they can have a clear place to have their nest."

Most recently, our Advocates also learned about the water cycle, where our water comes from, and why it is so important to conserve such a valuable resource!

Wylon from Vero Beach Elementary said, "Our tap water comes from an aquifer in the ground. It is important to not waste water because we share that water with 10 million people and plants and animals. You cannot waste water by not drinking bottled water, take shorter showers, and use a reusable bottle."

This month, our Advocates will learn about reptiles, take a trip to the Indian River County Landfill, and prepare for their graduation ceremonies!

### Saving Paradise, What Do you Value? At a Glance...

by Donna Halleran, Executive Director

Florida has over 3,200 native species of plants. Pelican Island Audubon Society has approximately 68 species of plants at the Audubon House for sale. And Florida has 269 species of animals only found in our state. There are 29 species of native bees which are endemic to Florida.

Florida has nearly 8,000 lakes, 1,700 rivers, streams, and springs, thousands of miles of canals and extensive wetlands.

Florida's Largest native tree is a Bald Cypress. (Hamilton County, Florida). It measures 557 inches in circumference, stands 84 feet tall, and carries a crown spread of 49 feet. However, look at Indian River County's gorgeous Live Oaks.

The genus Coreopsis, (common name: tickseed) was designated

Florida's official wildflower, with several kinds available from Pelican Island Audubon Society.

Our state animal is the Florida Panther, with an estimated 120-140 panthers left in the wild. National Geographic has a great movie; "The Path of the Panther". Being shown on television in May. The Florida Scrub Jay is endemic to Florida and can only be found in Florida scrub habitat, an ecosystem that exists only in central Florida and limited areas of the Atlantic coast which

include Indian River County.

Indian River County's population continues to grow, for the most part unplanned & exponentially, with residential construction becoming the cornerstone of our county's economy. As the industry grows, new homes have shifted to mass clearings. Due to the disturbed soils turf grass is installed that are dependent on in-ground irrigation systems, which require a daily average of 200 gallons of freshwater, more than a typical household uses.



Dr. Nathan Burkett-Cadena, Florida Medical Entomology Laboratory,, works with the Audubon Advocates.

Florida's natural ecosystems and further contribution of excess nutrient pollution that affects our watershed and lagoon system.

The larger problem is loss of

To Save Paradise, you must pay attention and get involved. What native tree do you like best? Have you had an encounter with a Florida Scrub Jay? Do you enjoy watching the native bees pollinating the native plants? What is your favorite native flower? And where is it located? Have you watched the Roseate

Spoonbill build their nests, or flock together, lately? What do you value? It's time to speak up and take action so the next generations can have the same opportunities. We must take time off from electronic devices to see, feel, and enjoy nature because there is "No App for That."

The statistics above come from the New Yard Pattern Book for Florida's Sustainable Single-Family Homes, which was produced by Dix, Hite and Partners for the Outdoor Sustainable Landscape Collaborative in 2022.

### Our 2023 Audubon Heroes!

by Richard H. Baker, Ph.D.

Pelican Island Audubon depends on volunteers to make our chapter one of the best. We have received twelve awards in the last fifteen years (e.g. Best Florida Chapter, Best Education Project and Best Conservation Project, and Best Leadership Awards). We appreciate the many contributions our volunteers make and thus honor a few of them every year with our Awards. They help us with our mission by preserving and protecting the animals, plants, and natural communities, ...though education, advocacy, and public awareness by teaching us about birds, bringing in new members, funding our projects, and saving our land and water. Here are our 2023 awardees:

Phyllis Stockburger Award to a long time supportive PIAS member David Simpson who is one of the best birders in Florida and offers birding tours. For the last 9 years, David has taught the Intensive Birding Class with Dr. Juanita and started the Big Sit at the Stick Marsh. His expertise has aided students immensely brought and in new Audubon members and funding.

Board Member of the Year Award to Steve Palmquist for spending many hours doing a fantastic job volunteering and developing our Trees for Life/ Plants for Birds project. He gets native plants at nurseries, raises

them from seeds, waters and weeds them, and helps distribute them to the public.

Maggy Bowman Conservationist of the Year Award to Dan Lamson, Executive Director of the Indian River Neighborhood Assoc. As a member of the four-person working group, he was instrumental passing the 2022 local 50M bond referendum to protect environmentally sensitive lands. He also presented at many of the Sebastian meetings dealing with the Sebastian Annexation and has taken on many initiatives and programs to educate local citizens on policy decisions being made at the state and local levels.

Environmental Educator Award to Alexis Peralta, one of the best educators in the county especially at the County's Egret Marsh Stormwater Park who for many years educates our Audubon Advocates, summer and spring break students on stormwater concerns and bird ID in the field. She also along with

her husband Logan have made great presentations of their trips abroad.

Environmental Citizen Award to Tim Glover President of the Friends of St. Sebastian River for helping our attempts to improve the Sebastian Annexation of the Graves Brothers' Property. He met with city council members and wrote policy letters and advanced the cause of protecting the headwaters of the St. Sebastian River. He is a wonderful supporter of PIAS and is an environmental leader in the north part of our County.

Environmental Landscaper Award to Stephanie Dunn, one of the best Landscapers in Florida who designed our Education & Demonstration Native Plant Gardens at the entrance to the County Commission and also Up against Poverty Center. She volunteers to weed and keep the plants looking beautiful in these

gardens.

President's Award to Dr. Hadi Shalhoub, for being a tremendous volunteer for our Trees for Life/Plants for Birds program. Although a vascular surgeon with two offices in Sebastian and Brevard County, he volunteers nearly every Sunday to look after our native nursery trees. He built 44 cages to stop squirrels eating over 1,000 young oak trees.

Eleanor & Bud Kleckner Generosity Award to Dr. Albert Alley, for providing valuable insight from his past experience working with non-profits to help PIAS kick start its own fundraising events. He generously donated funds

that enabled PIAS to host two successful fund raisers over the last 12 months, one at Schacht Groves and the other at Grand Harbor.

Special Recognition Award to Ray & Beth Smith who own Long Shadow Ranch and have their land in a conservation easement. They have allowed PIAS the opportunity to go birdwatching on their property as well as see how a fifth generation ranch is run with another fundraising event to take place out at the ranch.

Environmental Youth Award to Shaelan Conway for producing a video "Saving the Manatees" that show what young people can do to help our environment/Lagoon which can be found on our website https://youtu.be/qHEzD6bsWcY . She also became the spokesperson to get others involved in the Riverkidz.

**Volunteer of the Year Award to Brenda Fuller** for adding so much with new ideas and working on how to improve our Trees for Life/Plants for Birds Nursery.



### Rethinking our economy, our society and our environment

by Graham Cox, Ph.D., Pelican Island Audubon Society Board Member

If you are, like me, very concerned about the planet we are leaving to our kids, grand kids and great grandkids – yes, I am that old – let me suggest three books for bedtime reading that provide a whole different perspective on where we can go to bring us back from the brink.

Read number one is The New Climate War, by Michael E. Mann. Dr. Mann is distinguished professor pf Atmospheric Science at Penn State and 2007 Nobel Peace Prize recipient. In the reviews section of the paperback the book is described as an insightful treatise on how the polluting fossil fuel industry and their right wing allies have deflected the blame for the climate crisis.

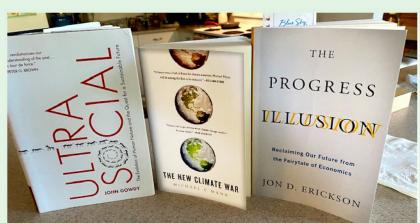
"The book charts a common sense course for collective action to force government and corporations to make real solutions to the climate crisis – an existential threat to humanity and the planet." A second reviewer says the book is described as "blunt, lucid ....Consistently displaying his comprehensive command of climate science and the attendant politics....An expert effectively debunks the false narrative of denialism and advocates communal resistance to fossil fuels."

Dr. Mann explains how the big polluters have changed their attack on climate change as an idea, moving from denial – they can see the writing on the wall – to simply saying we should sit back and enjoy the carbon ride because there is nothing we can do about it.

A third reviewer says the book "takes the reader behind the front lines into the decades-long information war waged by the fossil fuels industry and those that share their interests.....Michael Mann provides hope and a roadmap for all of us to address the systemic issues fueling climate change, and shows how we can come together to wage a new war in the fight for the future."

Read number two is The Progress Illusion: Reclaiming Our Future from the Fairytale of Economics, by Dr. Jon D. Erickson, an ecological economist at the University of Vermont. In a review "Erickson shows how flawed economic thinking has shaped not only our economy but also our society and politics . . . The story is both deeply disturbing and hopeful, as Erickson describes an emerging brand of economics that shifts the focus from GDP to well-being."

Erickson walks us through the old ways of economic thinking that led us here and reveals a potential path forward. "It is a searing, authoritative, and well documented indictment of an economics that advocates economic growth as the solution for every problem created by economic growth." In these weeks of bank failures and old economic solutions to old economic and financial problems Erickson's book could not be better timed!



In a review of Erickson's book we learn of the connections: Erickson shows how "growth-driven economies, worsening inequities, and greenhouse gas emissions are interconnected, and thus it is possible to envision alternative paths forward which address all three."

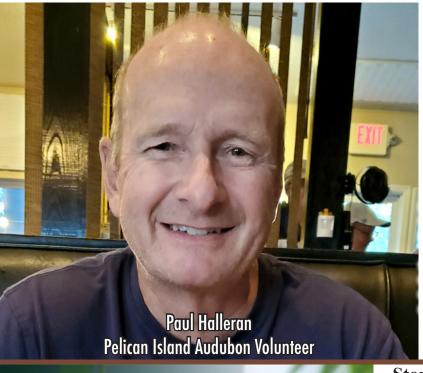
Read number three is Ultrasocial: The Evolution of Human Nature and the Quest for a Sustainable Future, by Dr. John Gowdy, Emeritus Professor of Economics at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, NY.

Gowdy seems to be following in the footsteps of ecologist E.O. Wilson, whose study of ants led him to look at the way all societies, including humans, on all scales work. Gowdy "puts forward the provocative case that as we come under the yoke of states, humans become closer to ants and termites. Individually we may still be social primates, but collectively we are now closer to a leafcutter ant colony. And building on fresh understandings of evolution this book revolutionizes our understanding of the past and explores a future in which our humanity may be rekindled on a planet likely to be too hot to sustain conventional agriculture."

"Human economy has become an ultrasocial superorganism (similar to an ant or termite colony) with the requirements of the superorganism taking precedence over the individual within it. Human society is now an autonomous, highly integrated network of technologies, institutions and belief systems dedicated to the expansion of economic production ....far from advocating personal freedom it leads to sacrificing the well-being of individuals for the benefit of the global market."

According to one reviewer, Ultrasocial is a fascinating exploration of what this means for the future direction of humanity: Can we forge a better, more egalitarian, and sustainable future by changing this socioeconomic – and ultimately destructive – path? Gowdy explores how this might be achieved.

A final word, a disclosure of my interest in their stories: Drs. Gowdy and Erickson were my own mentors at RPI and UVM 20 years ago, making up two thirds of my doctoral advisory committee.



### Volunteer!

### PelicanIslandAudubon.org

to view the list of volunteer positions. Fill out the form online and let us know what you are interested in.

### Working together we can do great things for the environment

### **Volunteer opportunities include:**

- Office help, Newsletter: fold, stuff envelopes
- Join the air potato pullers
- Audubon House Maintenance- classroom, bathrooms,
- Landscaping, Trees for Life Project, watering plants
- Field Trip Leader
- Fundraising
- Come join the Tree/Native Plants Team!" Sun/Wed/Fri 9AM-11:00AM Help Green IRC!!!

A big thanks to everyone who makes it all work!

Be a part of birding's biggest team! Global Big Day is an annual celebration of the birds around you.

The Cornell Lab LOBAI 13 MAY 2023 ebird.org/globalbigday

Cedar Waxwing Bombycilla cedrorum © Joshua Brown

Stop by and browse the native plant nursery - over 16,000 native plants trees distributed so far!

> Free Trees Available in 1 gallon pots: Southern Live Oak

> > Attracts insects for birds

Mahogany

Nice tree

**Bald Cypress** 

Also grows in dry soil

A selection of native plants are also available at low prices.

Audubon House - 195 9th Street SE (Oslo Rd), Vero Beach, on Wednesday - Friday - Sunday from 9AM to 11AM

> More at PelicanIslandAudubon.org



### Go Green!

Members may sign up to have the Peligram emailed to them. Saves postage and paper. Email piaudubon@yahoo.com with your name & email address with "Peligram" in the subject line.

Pelican Island Audubon Society Membership Fo	orm
Employed to mare	

1 circuit ibiaita i tadac	on society intelligership rotting
	Enclosed is my:
NAME	\$\$25 for annual membership
ADDRESS	\$\$30 for family membership
	\$\$100 Scrub-Jay sustaining membershi
	\$\$200 Osprey sustaining membership
	\$ contribution
CITY, STATE ZIP	* TOTAL  Please mail this completed form with a check made out to:  Pelican Island Audubon Society
E-MAIL	P.O. Box 1833 Vero Beach, FL 32961
Or join online using a credit	card at www.PelicanIslandAudubon.org

# Save THIS Date: January 6, 2024 Mark Your Calendar For GREAT FUN!

## THE AMERICAN MUSCLE CAR MUSEUM

It's for the birds . . .
Our wildlife, plants & Lagoon

The new American Muscle Car Museum is hosting their FIRST fund raising party & tour of the New Year to benefit Pelican Island Audubon Society the evening of January 6th. The American Muscle Car Museum is one of the very TOP car museums in America and it's in Melbourne, Florida. There will be food, beer & wine, great auction prizes, plus enjoy a relaxed tour of the spectacular 300+ museum quality cars, all INCLUDED in your donation/ ticket. The museum is always closed to the public, open only for their charitable fund-raising parties. this is indeed a rare, FUN opportunity to see the museum and help Pelican Island Audubon Society to help our environment.

