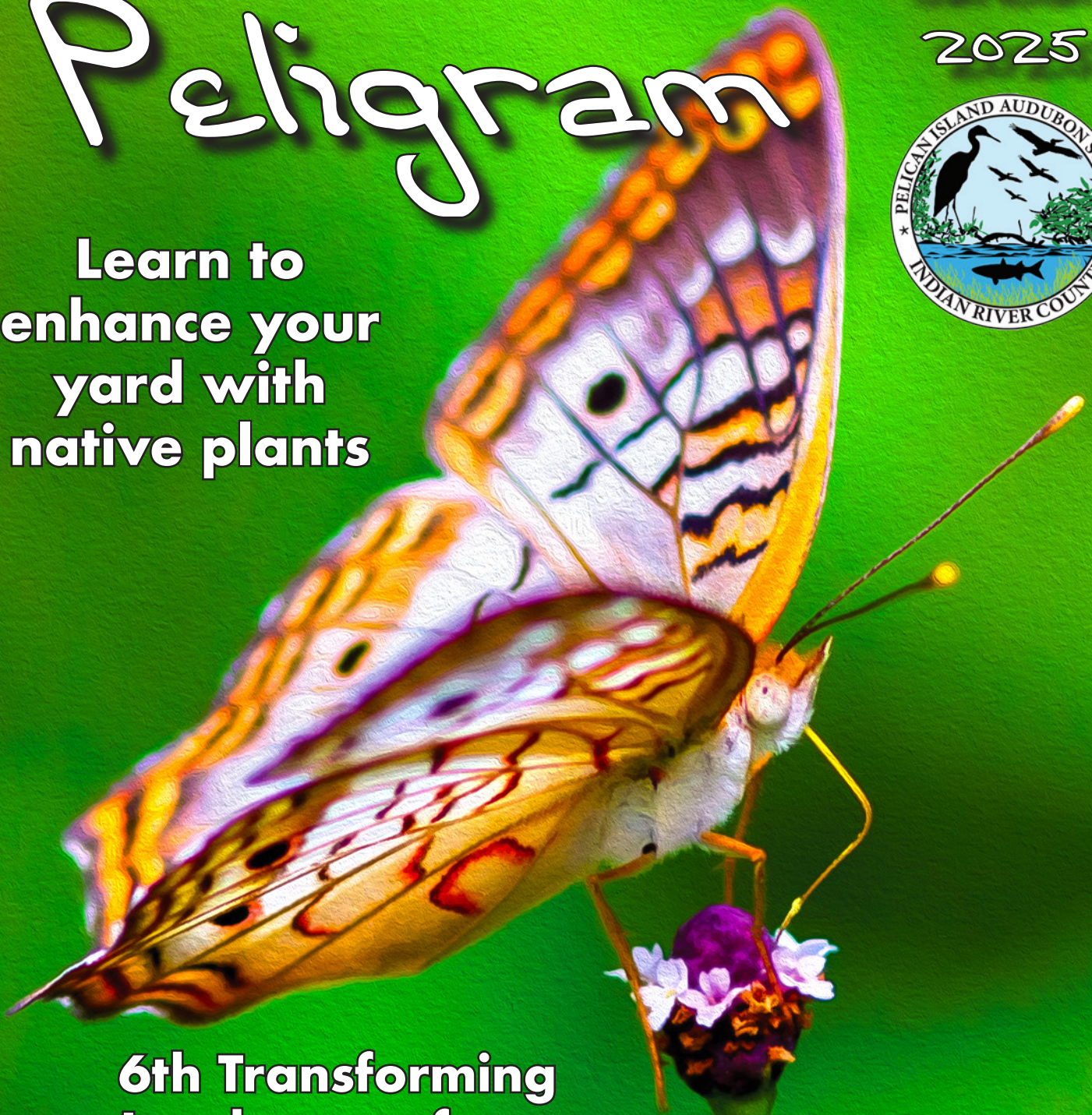


# Peligram

January  
2025



**Learn to  
enhance your  
yard with  
native plants**



**6th Transforming  
Landscapes for a  
Sustainable Future  
Conference**

**Saturday, January 18, 2025  
at the Emerson Center  
1590 27th Avenue, Vero Beach**

**Learn more &  
purchase tickets at  
[www.PelicanIslandAudubon.org](http://www.PelicanIslandAudubon.org)**



RiverKidz is a nature club that meets twice a month for the **WHOLE** family to enjoy. Our meetups consist of guest speakers, field trips, educational activities, service activities, kayaking, and more! If you ever wanted to be involved in helping your environment or you just want to explore the outdoors more, this is the group to join. For more info, email [piaudubonedu@gmail.com](mailto:piaudubonedu@gmail.com)

- 1/11 - All About Reptiles
- 1/25 - Living Plastic Free - Open to everyone - Adults & Kidz

**Our mission:** is to speak out, get involved, and raise awareness because we believe KidZ should have a voice in the future of the Indian River Lagoon. A nature club sponsored by Pelican Island Audubon Society and Clean Water Coalition.

**All RiverKidz events are FREE and open to the public.**  
Register by emailing [piaudubonedu@gmail.com](mailto:piaudubonedu@gmail.com)

## FIELD TRIPS

Space is limited. Registration is required.  
For more information & to register visit

**[PelicanIslandAudubon.org](http://PelicanIslandAudubon.org)**

- Jan 16 T.M. Goodwin Wildlife Management Area (WMA) & Broadmoor with Becky Loftus and Ann Esmas
- Jan 19 Bicycle tour of T.M. Goodwin WMA & Broadmoor with Steve Goff
- Jan 26 Orlando Wetlands Park with Bill & Becky Loftus
- Jan 30 Capt. Forster Hammock Preserve with Wes & Susan Lovelace
- Feb 6 Indrio Savannahs Preserve with Nick Polge
- Feb 8 Pelican Island NWR with Will Johnson
- Feb 12 Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge with Becky Loftus and Ann Esmas
- March 2 - Fort Drum Marsh Conservation Area with George Glenn
- March 18 Sebastian Inlet State Park with Steve Palmquist

*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.*

Executive Director **Donna Halleran**  
Environmental Educator **Jennifer Satterly**  
Office Manager **Bob Montanaro**

### Officers & Directors

#### Officers

Board Chair **Richard H. Baker, Ph.D.**  
1st Vice-Chair **Bill Halliday**

2nd Vice-Chair **Steve Palmquist**  
Recording Secretary **Darlene Halliday**  
Corresponding Secretary **OPEN**  
Treasurer **Steve Goff**  
Elected Directors:  
**Albert Alley, M.D. '26**  
**Susan Lovelace '25**  
**Bill Loftus, Ph.D. '27**  
**Ricky Ray '25**  
**Bonnie Swanson '27**  
Appointed Board Members:  
**Judy Davis**  
**Nancy Irvin**  
**William Johnson**  
**Nick Polge**  
**Hadi Shalhoub**

**Attention!!**  
**Beginning Wednesday,**  
**October 2nd, the Audubon**  
**House Native Plant Nursery**  
**will be open on**  
**Monday-Wednesday-Saturday**  
**9AM - 11AM**  
**Audubon House**  
**195 9th Street SE (Oslo Road), Vero Beach**

**The Nursery will no longer**  
**be open on Sundays.**

## Tram Tours of Pelican Island NWR

Registration is open for the 2025 wildlife tours at Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge. Free tram tours are offered every Wednesday from 8-10 a.m., beginning January 8 through April 30. Tour guides will share information about the history of Pelican Island - the nation's first wildlife refuge - and the many species of birds and other wildlife found at the refuge. Reservations are required because of limited space. Please call (772) 581-5557, leave your name and phone number and a refuge volunteer will contact you to schedule a tour.



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.

**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  
**E-Mail:** [piaudubon@yahoo.com](mailto:piaudubon@yahoo.com)  
**Website:**  
[www.PelicanIslandAudubon.org](http://www.PelicanIslandAudubon.org)

# Happy New Year - You Can Make This a Better Year for us ALL

## My Hoot



Our Holiday Season is a time to be Thankful for our friends, for our success in getting through the year, and for anticipating for a Happy New Year. Yes, this past year saw major events on this Earth, both in our relationships, politics, and the environment where we live and in the world. We have lost a sense of decent behavior towards those we disagree with, resulting in so much war, especially in Israel, Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine, and Russia. Even our **schools** no longer seem safe havens for our children!

Politically, in many countries, including the U.S. and even in Florida, there are differing views on how we move forward. Environmentally, the last two years were the hottest recorded worldwide because of excessive CO<sub>2</sub> and methane from fossil-fuel combustion. The greenhouse effect has heated and acidified the oceans and affected global weather patterns. As a result, many of our bird and animal species, including native insects and frogs, have disappeared. In the 1980s when we moved here, driving a half hour in the countryside, our windshields were covered with splattered insects. No more. Even in 2001, we could hear four species of frogs at night. No more.

The **climate clock for our world** is ticking. It may seem such a huge problem that we feel hopeless sometimes, but there are steps each of us can take to bring our community together here and now. There are PIAS efforts and projects that support local conservation initiatives, such as encouraging native landscaping, that can benefit our local environment to help our birds and wildlife and provide birding opportunities for the community. We are in our 10th year educating our kids about the need to protect our environment through our Audubon Advocate, IRC River Kidz, and Homeless Children programs. We hope you will attend our 6th "Transforming Landscapes for a Sustainable Future Conference" on January 18, 2025, to hear six great speakers talking about *Native Trees for Birds*, *Green Landscaping to the Next Level*, *Bring on the Butterflies*, *No-Mow Lawns in Florida*, *Healthy Ponds Using Native Plants for a Sustainable Future*, and *State Parks and Wildlife Corridors: Strategies for a Sustainable Future*. For a nominal fee that includes lunch, you will join like-minded folks to learn much information you can apply in your yard.

Our **Trees for Life/Plants for Birds** project needs to be expanded. Lawns and turfgrass use an enormous amount of precious, diminishing drinkable water. Keeping these lawns healthy requires using poisonous pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers that pollute our water and fuel algal growth that kills aquatic plants and seagrasses that provide habitat and food for fishes, manatees, and other animals. Thus, let's all reduce our Turfgrass! Urge lawmakers to pass stronger landscaping and tree ordinances. Let's all start a trend: remove most of our turfgrass and plant native ground covers, plants, and trees - vital for birds and animals - that do not require lots of our drinking water, fertilizers, and the use of CO<sub>2</sub>-producing mowing machines. How? Easy. Put down cardboard (a tree product that is free). Cover with a mulch. Pine straw (pine needles) works best for the plants as it provides nutrients with the cardboard that the native plants can use. Non-native plants are mostly toxic or unattractive to our local insects and birds. Please plant Florida Native plants that the birds and butterflies will love you for! You will set an example for your neighbor! You can start small and gradually expand plot by plot to eliminate turfgrass. Even planting one native tree will help shade your home, reduce heat/electricity use, and absorb CO<sub>2</sub>. If everyone does this, it will greatly impact our climate change issues. If you live in an HOA and own the land, inform them beforehand about your attractive intentions. Florida Law states that a HOA can not stop you from planting a native plant if you own your property. So please do it.

Our trees also protected our homes from recent hurricanes by reducing the wind speed and providing a shield from debris. Their root system anchored the soil and reduced water runoff by absorbing rainwater to stop flooding. Also, they give us peace by quieting unwanted road and train noises. Studies show that stepping into nature, even in your backyard, can benefit your physical and mental well-being.

Come to Audubon House and our PIAS Native Plant/Tree Nursery M-W-Sat 9-11:00 am for consultation and purchasing native plants, or pick up free Southern Life Oak, Bald Cypress, or Mahogany trees! Purchase a native plant or shrub that attracts birds, butterflies, and other wildlife. We have distributed over 27,000 native plants and trees.

What else can you do to reduce our carbon footprint and lower our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions? **1.** Compost your vegetable table scraps and shredded paper by throwing them in a bin outside, moisten and stir them every few days, and leave them to decay naturally. When full, put into plastic soil bags. Voila! It makes great potting soil! When food rots in a landfill, it produces methane, a powerful greenhouse gas, **2.** Install solar water heaters and wind turbines for electrical power for your home. **3.** Insulate your home and weather strip your windows and doors; **4.** Buy Energy Star appliances, **5.** Get a hybrid or electric vehicle **6.** Eat more vegetables to reduce meat production that produces CO<sub>2</sub>. **7.** Reduce, reuse, repair, and recycle clothes and shop second-hand.

Lastly, talk to your neighbors, colleagues, friends, family, and even our local and world leaders about what steps you are taking to help save the Earth and what they can do too. Working together in 2025, we can make a difference. Happy New Year



## Nature Journaling with our Audubon Advocates *by Jennifer Satterly, Environmental Educator*

It has been a busy few months with our Audubon Advocates program. The students started their Audubon Advocate journey in August and graduated from the program at the beginning of December. These students got to join us once a week for 14 weeks, learning all things Florida. They had guest speakers, field trips, and fun projects they worked on throughout the 14 weeks.

One of the newest projects we worked on this semester was nature journaling. We had a class very early in the semester with Susan Lovelace, who taught our students about using their observation skills with a strawberry. They took 2 minutes to look closely at the strawberry and then journaled everything they observed with their eyes. After that, they did two more minutes for each of their other senses, including listening to the strawberry. When the kids completed their two minutes, as a class, we would go over everything they observed with that sense. After we worked through all five senses, we moved on to wondering. They had two minutes to think about everything they wondered about the strawberry. They wondered why the strawberry was red, why it had seeds on the outside, who was the first to eat it, why it was called a strawberry, and so on. After sparking their curiosity, we had two final minutes to think about everything this strawberry reminded us of. Some of the kid's memories were of picnics with their families, special desserts made with strawberries, sunny beach days with friends, and more. This was the beginning of their nature journal experiences.

Throughout the semester, the kids were asked to take what they learned with the strawberry and go out into nature doing the same things. We asked them to spend 15 to 20 minutes out in nature and journal about it each week. They had to work through their five senses, curiosities, and memories. They were also told to include words, numbers, and drawings along with those parameters. They also had to fill in their metadata on the top of their page, such as the date, time, weather, and where they were journaling. Each week, the kids would bring in their journals, and if they wanted, they would get a chance to share their journal entries with their classmates and teachers. They would get a sticker each time they journal and receive a prize for accomplishing five nature journal entries. They got a second prize and recognition at graduation for completing 10 total journal entries.

Nature journaling is a great skill that makes us more mindful during our time outside. It helped the students to become more observant of their surroundings in nature. It seemed to increase their curiosity about what they saw happening around them. It helped them slow their bodies down and become more mindful. Overall, we found that the classes with many kids actively participating in nature journaling were more curious, aware, and excited on our trips. They looked forward to adding new experiences to their journals and sharing what they saw with their classmates and friends.

We will continue our nature journal projects with our next group of Audubon Advocates which will be starting their 14 weeks at the end of January. These students will receive their journals on the very first day of class, and we will actively work on filling the pages throughout the entire semester, which will end in the beginning of May. We are hopeful to have more students participating in the journaling at home. I am a big believer of connecting people with nature so they will fall in love with it and want to care for it. That is what we are trying to do here with our Advocates, and the nature journaling seems to help with that connection, and it continues connecting them even when they aren't in class here at the Audubon House. We are excited to see the nature journal project continue to unfold.



If you are interested in a nature journaling class, check out our River Kidz program on the 2nd and 4th Saturday of each month. There will be a nature journaling class coming up in February or March. You can find us on Facebook at IRC River Kidz or email Jen Satterly at [piaudubonedu@gmail.com](mailto:piaudubonedu@gmail.com) to be added to the mailing list so you know about the upcoming classes. Even if you don't want to join a class, I would still recommend getting a journal and starting some nature journaling. This is only a 15-20 minute commitment at a time, but it is so good for your brain and your body. Believe it or not, 2 hours a week in nature can lower your blood pressure and cortisol levels, reduce stress, and much more. Nature journaling is a great way to accomplish this.

# LEARN TO ENHANCE YOUR YARD WITH NATIVE PLANTS 6TH TRANSFORMING LANDSCAPES FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

JANUARY 18, 2025  
AT THE EMERSON CENTER

1590 27TH AVENUE  
VERO BEACH, FL 32960

## CONFERENCE SCHEDULE



### SPONSORS

Become a conference sponsor and get your name or business listed here!

**\$2,500**

•Dr. Albert & Virginia Alley

**\$1,500**

**\$1,000**

- Kay Gibson
- Goff & Associates
- George & Ann Hamner
- Drs. Andrew Liu & Brenda Baker
- Native Butterfly Flowers Nursery
- Windsor Properties

**\$500**

- Eugenia Chapter - FNPS

**\$250**

- Advanced Vascular Systems
- Clean Water Coalition of IRC
- Conradina Chapter - FNPS
- Environmental Learning Center
- Friends of St. Sebastian River
- Garden Club of Indian River County
- Indian River Land Trust
- Indian River Neighborhood Association
- Ralph Johansen
- Pelican Island Conservation Society
- Sierra Club Turtle Coast Group
- St. Lucie Audubon Society

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 8:00AM        | <b>Online Registration-PelicanIslandAudubon.org-Tickets \$25 &amp; includes box lunch. \$35 after Jan 12.</b> Native plants on sale from Native Plant Nurseries  |
| 9:00-9:50     | <b>Dr. Craig N. Huegel</b> , Curator, University of South Florida Botanical Garden, owner and operator of Hawthorn Hill Native Wildflowers, and teaches biology at St. Petersburg College. <i>Native Trees for Birds</i>                             |
| 10:00-10:50   | <b>Troy Springer</b> , Founder & President, Springer Environmental Services, <i>Taking Green Landscaping to the Next Level</i>   |
| 10:50-11:10   | Break   <b>Native plants on sale from Native Plant Nurseries</b>   |
| 11:10-12:00PM | <b>Emily Bell</b> , Communications Coordinator, Florida Wildflower Foundation. <i>Bring on the Butterflies</i>   |
| 12:00-1:00    | <b>Lunch with Box Lunches included in the \$25 admission ticket for those attending in person.</b>   |
| 1:00-1:50     | <b>Tia Silvasy</b> , University of Florida Residential Horticulture Extension Agent, Hillsborough County, <i>No Mow Lawns in Florida</i>   |
| 2:00-2:50     | <b>Dr. Lyn Gettys</b> , Associate Professor of Agronomy (Aquatic and Wetland Plant Science) University of Florida/IFAS Fort Lauderdale Research and Education Center in Davie, FL. <i>Healthy Ponds Using Native Plants for a Sustainable Future</i> |
| 2:50-3:20     | Break   <b>Native plants on sale from Native Plant Nurseries</b>   |
| 3:20-4:10     | <b>Eric Draper</b> , Retired Florida Park Service Director & Former Audubon Florida Society Executive Director. <i>State Parks and Wildlife Corridors: Strategies for a Sustainable Future</i>   |
| 4:10-4:30     | <b>Dr. Richard Baker</b> - Discussion and Summary  |

LEARN MORE ABOUT PELICAN ISLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY

**WWW.PELICANISLANDAUDUBON.ORG**

PHONE: 772-567-3520

EMAIL: PIAUDUBON@YAHOO.COM

This event is a fund raiser for the Habitat For Humanity Gifford Gardens native plant landscaping project.

# SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES



**Dr. Craig N. Huegel**, Curator, University of South Florida Botanical Garden, owner and operator of Hawthorn Hill Native Wildflowers, and teaches biology at St. Petersburg College. Former faculty member, Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, University of Florida where he cofounded the Cooperative Urban Wildlife Extension Program. Author of *Native Florida Plants for Shady Landscapes*, *Native Wildflower and Other Ground Covers for Florida Landscapes*, and *Naïve Plant Landscaping for Florida Wildlife*. Uses central Florida landscapes as laboratories to evaluate native plants and grows a wide variety of species (mostly wildflowers) that are not commonly propagated elsewhere.



**Troy Springer**, Founder & President, Springer Environmental Services, Landscape Professional. 27 years of experience in landscaping and maintenance. He closed Springer Lawn Care and opened Springer Environmental Services to design, build, and maintain high end wildflower meadow projects ranging from urban landscapes to restoring natural areas for private landowners from small installations under \$5,000 to projects over \$100,000 using 98% all natives plant materials. Active in the Florida Native Plant Society for over fifteen years, including the Suncoast Chapter and state board and received a Green Palmetto Award for service.



**Emily Bell** joined the Florida Wildflower Foundation in 2022 as its communications coordinator. Prior to that, she spent four years coordinating invasive species programs within UF IFAS Extension and for the Florida Invasive Species Partnership. She began her conservation career as an intern for The Nature Conservancy and went on to work for the Florida Department and Environmental Protection and Hawaii Invasive Species Council. She has over a decade of experience with environmental outreach, planning and network building. Emily was born and raised in the wilds of Florida.



**Tia Silvasy** is a Residential Horticulture Extension Agent in Hillsborough County. She leads the Master Gardener Volunteer program and provides educational programming to help homeowners work towards more sustainable landscapes. She got her agricultural roots from growing up on her grandparents' farm in Pennsylvania. She's been working in the horticulture field for over 30 years. Tia received her undergraduate degree from the University of Central Florida and her master's degree from the University of Hawaii.



**Dr. Lyn Gettys'** research is focused on the biology and ecology of native and introduced aquatic and wetland plants, developing restoration strategies for native aquatic plants, and evaluation of control methods for managing invasive species. She coordinates the UF/IFAS Aquatic Weed Control Short Course and is an author on more than 300 publications, including 75 refereed papers and 33 articles in *Aquatics* magazine, and was lead editor *Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Foundation's Best Management Practices Manual*. Was the 2022 President and currently President-elect of the Florida Aquatic Plant Management Society and the 2022 President of the Florida Weed Science Society and Board Member of Directors and the Science Advisory Panel for the Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Foundation.



**Eric Draper** advises agencies, non-profits, and businesses on environmental finance and policy. He serves on the boards of the Florida Bicycle Association and Conservation Florida. As former Florida Park Service Director, Florida State Parks increased acreage, revenue, and environmental education programs and were awarded an unprecedented fourth gold medal as America's best state parks. Over a 40-year conservation career as Executive Director of Audubon Florida, Senior Vice President National Audubon Society, and working for The Nature Conservancy, he has been a leading advocate for land preservation, water resource protection, and Everglades restoration.

# Ten years and still going strong

by Donna Halleran  
Executive Director



Ten years ago, the Pelican Island Audubon Society Educator Center held its grand opening and celebrated its fifty-year anniversary. We set out with a bold vision: to help underserved youth find a path to success through an innovative outdoor science nature program off school campuses. Aubrey, one of our first participants, recalls how the program changed her life: “I never thought I would love nature so much and want to care for it for future generations.”

From the challenges we faced in the early years—such as limited resources and skepticism—today, we proudly stand as a leader in providing environmental education to the youth of Indian River County. We have been recognized for our innovative programs and the lasting relationships we’ve built with the elementary schools participating in the

program. We couldn’t have achieved this without the incredible support of our donors, grantors, volunteers, and community partners. Your commitment to our cause has driven every success.

We have served over 1,000 fifth graders from four Title I schools and an additional 700 campers through outdoor nature camps, including older students from sixth through twelfth grades. As we enter the next decade, we’re more determined than ever to reach even more young people who need a healthy environment and its benefits. In 2024, we were honored with the Indian River County Children Services Advisory Committee’s Golden Impact Award for our innovative approach to educating youth outside the classroom through our Audubon Advocate Afterschool Program and Adventure Camp(s). This recognition

reflects our team’s hard work and nature’s transformative power.

Our growth wouldn’t have been possible without the unwavering support of our members and community advocates, whose donations helped us expand our resources. We also want to thank our volunteers, who work tirelessly to ensure that every young person can engage with nature and enjoy its benefits, regardless of status.

None of this would have been possible without the dedication, commitment, and hard work of Dr. Graham Cox, our beloved grant writer and community advocate. Join us as we continue to grow, adapt, and inspire future generations. Together, we’ll make the next ten years even more impactful.



## Winter Warbler Watch *by Linda Chancellor*

It was the week before Thanksgiving when I first spotted the tiny bird in my backyard. It moved so quickly from branch to branch that I barely had time to focus my binoculars before he moved again. I was pretty sure it had to be a Warbler, but my Warbler identification skills are very sketchy. Several years ago, Sam and I had taken a Road Scholar trip that involved guided walks to see warblers and learn their identifications. Even then I found it difficult to focus my binoculars on the quick moving birds, but I did finally see many of the species they pointed out.

I knew several species could be seen here in Florida, but I didn't expect them in my backyard. One identifying trait that I could remember was that one Warbler species constantly bobbed its tail - but this bird did not do that. He moved from branch to branch of the Lucky Nut tree, hidden most of the time, but finally I saw a flash of bright yellow. Then he hopped out onto a branch where I could finally see him. I didn't even need my binoculars. He had a black mask, white eyebrow and white stripes on the wings. I assumed it must be a Common Yellowthroat. But I grabbed my book and looked it up anyway. It turned out to be a Yellow-throated Warbler! I was thrilled because it was my first sighting of one of these beautiful warblers! The color of his throat matched the bright yellow flowers of the Lucky Nut tree. After that I saw him most morning, sometimes in the Lucky Nut but most often frequenting the branches of the nearby laurel oak trees.

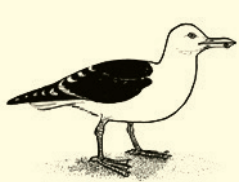
FYI- Yellow-throated warblers are found high up in tree canopies while other warbler species forage at mid-level or ground. They forage for insects along branches and probing crevices. They do not migrate and can be seen year-round in Florida.



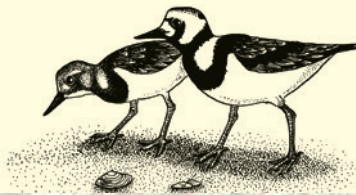
Yellow-throated Warbler by John James Audubon

Meeting - January 13, 2025 - North County Library  
1001 Sebastian Blvd. (C.R. 512), Sebastian, starting at 6PM - FREE

Meeting - January 27, 2025 - Vero Beach Community Center  
2266 14th Avenue, Vero Beach, starting at 7PM - FREE



Gulls of Florida  
with  
Michael Brothers



Shorebirds of Florida  
with  
Victoria Uribe



**SUSTAINABLE SEBASTIAN PRESENTS**

# AIR POTATO ROUND-UP

Saturday February 8, 2025

**VOLUNTEERS  
NEEDED!**

Despite their heart-shaped leaves, air potato plants are unfortunately not a friend to our local ecosystems. Air potato plants sprout new plants from their aerial tubers and can thrive in various conditions and habitats. This plant can quickly take over tracts of land, smothering our precious local landscapes and disturbing the ecological balance. You might find them crawling up your favorite palm tree or sprawling across the vacant lot next door.

Pelican Island Audubon Society and the Natural Resources Board need your help removing this invasive species from Stormwater Park, 297 Englar Drive, Sebastian, FL. Volunteer shift times are yet to be determined. Follow the City of Sebastian on Facebook and Instagram @cityofsebastian to learn more!



# Poison in the Indian River Lagoon:

Organ Failure is Imminent

by Michael Walther, M.S., P.E.



Seagrasses have declined. A 2022 report cites surveys that indicate between 2011 and 2019, about 58% of seagrasses

in the Lagoon were lost. Remaining seagrasses are generally found in shallow waters where water conditions allow for sufficient sunlight to reach the Lagoon bottom and allow photosynthesis in seagrass. The IRL National Estuary Program estimates that in 2021 the area of seagrasses in the Lagoon was only about 1/4 of the 1943 seagrass areas. Recent anecdotal estimates are that 85% of historical seagrasses have been lost.

Seagrass is a primary food for manatees in the Lagoon. Lagoon poisoning has led to the loss of seagrass and manatee mortality. An “Unusual Mortality Event” occurred between December 1, 2020, and December 31, 2022, after excessive nutrient loads into the Lagoon led to phytoplankton blooms and seagrass loss; 1,337 manatee deaths were recorded, with many attributed to starvation due to the loss of seagrass.

Seagrass is important to 260 of the nearly 400 species of fish that are found in the Lagoon. Healthy seagrass beds are estimated to contain on the order of 10,000 fish per acre of seagrass. Loss of seagrass has significantly reduced fish

populations – as reflected in fish landings data collected by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) which indicates – over the ten-year period from 2014 to 2023 within Indian River County:

- The spotted Seatrout population, which lives in seagrass, decreased by 98.5%;
- the Sheepshead population decreased by 53.7%; and
- even the Mangrove Snapper population decreased by 38.6%.

In addition, as an indicator of declining water resources:

- Redfish populations are so decimated that FWC prohibits the harvesting of Redfish anywhere within the Indian River Lagoon, where only Catch-and-release is allowed.
- FWC data indicate a 60% state-wide decline in the Black Drum population over the ten-year period from 2014 to 2023.

Local fishing guides say there are still fish to catch, but fish numbers have declined.

## Are the remaining fish safe to eat?

A 2014 study by scientists at Florida Atlantic University’s Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute found people living along the Indian River Lagoon who eat locally-caught seafood every day are nearly four times more likely to have a mercury concentration above the EPA’s recommended daily dose for human health. Researchers began the study after finding high levels of

mercury in Atlantic bottlenose dolphins in the lagoon. Dolphins are considered a “sentinel species” because they live long lives, have defined home ranges and consume some of the same fish species as humans. Studies by ORCA indicate that eating fish from the river and the lagoon occasionally and in moderate amounts is not considered a risk to health, but people with health issues, the young, and the elderly may be at greater risk.

**Is it safe to swim in the Lagoon?** The Florida Department of Health tests for enteric bacteria at public beaches under the Clean Beaches Program, but in only one location within the Indian River Lagoon, at the Wabasso Causeway. In 2020, CWC began weekly sampling for enteric bacteria in January 2020 at three Lagoon locations - at the Oslo boat ramp, by the City’s sewage treatment plant, and MacWilliams Park - places where people engaged in recreational contact with Lagoon waters. High enteric bacterial levels in recreational waters pose a potential health risk and may cause upset stomach, diarrhea, eye irritation, and skin rashes. CWC data shows too frequent exceedance of standards developed by the Florida Healthy Beaches Program and EPA’s Recreational Water Quality Criteria. The Surfrider Foundation monitors Lagoon waters in Brevard County, where the data also indicates occasions that exceed EPA and Florida Department of Health water quality standards.

*This is the fourth of six articles that started in the June 2024 Peligram.*

Save The Date  
*Under The Stars Gala*

Pelican Island  
Audubon Society's 60th  
Anniversary Celebration



*Saturday  
April 12, 2025  
at Schacht Groves*

More information  
coming soon.

**Adopt an Advocate!** Please help support our 14-week outdoor science, after-school Audubon Advocates program, which focuses each year on 5th graders from four underserved elementary schools.

**Goal:** Improve science vocabulary, mental health, and opportunities for under-represented minorities and girls to be comfortable outdoors and become Environmental Advocates for Indian River County.

**Focus:** Introduce students to outdoor, hands-on Lagoon science, help them understand the interconnectedness of life and the value of all native species, and help them be good stewards of the environment.

The environmental educator takes students outdoors into nature to kayak, photograph, sketch, meet a variety of scientists in the field, familiarize themselves with scientific methods, collect specimens, document their

experiences, and educate others at school and their parents, family, and friends. While learning “leave no trace & earth manners.”

**Results:** Educated, healthier, empowered students; new aspirations and possibilities for underrepresented students; and, over time, a healthier Lagoon.

**It will be transformative for the students, their parents, our community, and our environment—and for you as a sponsor!**

**Please Adopt an Advocate: Do Something Extraordinary! \$500 Supports One 5th Grader per term, or consider giving what you can.**

Help fund one or more students to attend our 14-week after-school program at Audubon House. Thank you!

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

My check is enclosed. Make check payable to Pelican Island Audubon Society, or donate online at [PelicanIslandAudubon.org](http://PelicanIslandAudubon.org)

1 Student \$500     any amount

(Please check) if you would like an update on your sponsored student.

**Pelican Island Audubon Society is looking for volunteers to help in the following areas:**

- Native Gardens – Help watering plants and/or selling plants
- Bird Walks – Lead walks - Kayak Tours – Lead tours
- Outreach – Help with events such as Festivals, Landscape Conference, help with movie nights, greeting people at monthly meetings
- Teaching a course of interest
- Grant writing

If you have any questions or the time to help with any of the above, please contact Lorna Thibeault at [piasvolunteer@gmail.com](mailto:piasvolunteer@gmail.com) or (203) 687-7156.

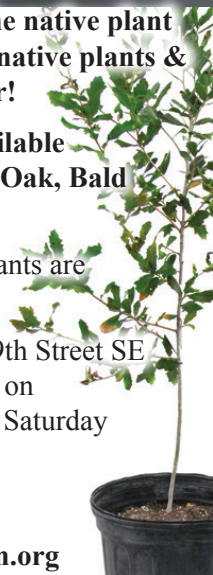
Stop by and browse the native plant nursery - over 20,600 native plants & trees distributed so far!

Free Native Trees Available in 1 gallon pots - Live Oak, Bald Cypress, Mahogany

A selection of native plants are available at low prices.

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

More at [PelicanIslandAudubon.org](http://PelicanIslandAudubon.org)



**Pelican Island Audubon Society Membership Form**

Enclosed is my:

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_ \$30 for annual membership

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_ \$35 for family membership

CITY, STATE ZIP \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_ \$100 Scrub-Jay sustaining membership

E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_ \$200 Osprey sustaining membership

\_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_ contribution

\_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL

Please mail this completed form with a check made out to:  
 Pelican Island Audubon Society  
 P.O. Box 1833  
 Vero Beach, FL 32961

Or join online using a credit card at [www.PelicanIslandAudubon.org](http://www.PelicanIslandAudubon.org)