



The Village Birders

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Love Under the Oaks

This morning as I enjoyed my coffee on the back porch my large oak was a chorus of spring. Even birds of the winter were happy for the day and songs last heard in the spring of the past were music to my ears. I enjoyed: the pairing of the Bluebirds as they snacked on my suet log and popped in and out of the box; Mr. & Mrs. Downey, close together, as they foraged up and down the trunk; Palm and Yellow-rumps chasing and flitting about; and flocks of Chipping Sparrows. The Mockingbirds were singing their many songs. I was treated to the happy song of two Northern Parulas which spent the morning buzzing about and couldn't resist my pishing as they just about landed on my head. Spring, with its anticipation of color and song, doesn't get better than this!

The Big Oak

Many years have passed since I was born,
Many changes I have seen.
My arms stretch out to reach the sun,
My dressing turns bright green.

My person brings her coffee here
to sip beneath my canopy,
Bins in hand and iPod too.
Who comes to visit, she will see.

Come one and all my feathered friends.
I offer food and cover.
Sing loud and clear, let others know
you're looking for a lover.

Barb Gay

Urban Warriors

In urban settings we have all seen him, the shaggy individual, poorly dressed, and wearing a ball cap with a ship's logo or battalion number. He is unfortunately homeless, a matter of social concern and once a proud and valuable soldier, now a displaced veteran. Look three feet to the right of his unkempt shoes and you'll find another unappreciated veteran, a pigeon.

These birds, truly scorned by most, soil our statues and buildings, clutter our streets and are referred to as "rats with feathers" - all true. Once however this bird was a critical part of the American and British war effort. As early as the 5th century BC pigeons were used to connect Persia and Syria. These historic pigeon cotes can be seen in those countries today. These civilizations greatly prized pigeon droppings as well and the cotes were collection areas. The material was used as fertilizer and by the 16th century was also used as a source of saltpeter, an essential ingredient of gunpowder. In Roman times doves were released to carry the results of the Olympic Games to outlying areas. That custom continues today as doves are released at the opening of the games. When Hannibal crossed the Alps elephants weren't the only creatures accompanying him; he carried pigeons to convey information back to his bases.

The First World War allowed the birds to prove their worth as communication agents. Mobile pigeon lofts were set up in the trenches and lofts on ships were the norm. The birds often had to fly through gas and shelling to get the messages home - and they did it, but the survival rate was only 10%. One bird named Cher Ami was shot in the leg and chest but continued

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Annual Meeting

The Village Birders annual meeting was held March 26 at Paradise Recreation center. We enjoyed an informal coffee and donut time followed by the meeting with introduction of the Board consisting of four elected members; President (Lyn Comans), Vice President pro tem (Charlie Finkbiner), Secretary (Patsy Nistico), and Treasurer (Steve Norton). There are also five appointed committee heads; Membership (Kathy Porter), Program and Education (Peggy Condon), Bird Walks and Special Events (Barb Gay), Web Site (Barb Athanasiou) and Newsletter (Charlie Martin). Descriptions of their responsibilities and reports by officers and committees were presented.

The First Annual Photo Contest was a big success with forty entries and several prizes awarded by vote. Attendees were provided with sophisticated voting devices and all members enjoyed the submitted photos and voted on their choices in seven categories. The winners were: Best in Show, Barb Athanasiou; Funniest, Al Rousch; Action, Charlie Martin; Meal Time, Allen Parker; Most Unusual, a tie, Allen Parker and Charlie Martin; Human/Bird interaction, Barb Athanasiou. All these great submitted images are viewable on our web site VillageBirders.org

The members also enjoyed a DVD presentation "Birders, Banders and Binoculars" produced by Idaho Public Television. If you missed the program you can borrow the DVD from the club.

At the request of the April and May speakers The Village Birders have made a contribution to Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation and the Hummer Bird/Study group of Clay, Alabama.

More coffee and donuts and congratulations all round on a great birding year.

Lyn Comans

Cheep Talk

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Casual Birder

So they wanted me to write a paragraph about being a "Casual Birder." At last I have a title. Yes, I love to see birds and have been enjoying these feathered creatures for years, but do I remember all of them? Can I identify one that is hidden in the bush or flitting by, or for that matter, flying by so high that only the silhouette is seen against the sky, or even just by the sound of its chirp or better yet, the flapping of its wings? Unequivocally, NO! But I do love to bird watch and when I recognize them in their natural habitat it is so exciting to me. And when the true BIRDERS go out birding, it is a wonderful experience each and every time I join them. They identify and point out birds that I wouldn't be able to see. Better yet, when they get excited about seeing a bird rarely seen in our area, well, you know that is exciting for all. So from the CASUAL BIRDER, going Birding with The Village Birders is a wonderful treat for me and I thank them all.

Carol Pozen

Warrior *continued from first page*

the 25 minute flight to deliver the intelligence information. She was awarded the Croix de guerre for heroic service.

During WW II a bird named GI Joe flew a message while avoiding friendly and disastrous fire on an occupied Italian village and received the Dickin Medal for bravery. But those wars did not serve all birds well; the famous White Cliffs of Dover were heavily populated with Peregrine Falcons. This presented a major problem for the carrier pigeons returning to England. The local populace was recruited to trap them as part of the war effort. That raptor decimation remains today.

The Coast Guard had another fascinating use for Ensign Pigeon. Before sonar or radar was reliable ships and planes carried pigeons. In poor weather conditions these focused little homers would peck determinedly in the "home" direction and help guide the crew safely to port. They have also been trained to identify red or yellow life jackets and signal that survivors are at a certain spot. Their excellent eyesight and reflexes make them very useful in this job.

Incredibly the last use of carrier pigeons was in India in 2004, the remaining flock was retired to live out their lives in peace.

Lyn Comans

Plans for Summer Birding

Some summer birding trips are being planned. Most of these trips will be spur of the moment because we don't know what might show up and where. Some of these trips will include kayaking. If you want to participate in the summer birding trips please e-mail me: ahorst@comcast.net. I will send e-mails to anyone who is interested when there are birds to see.

These are some of the trips we did last summer.

JULY: Withlacoochee State Forest and Chinsegut Nature Center.

This area has always been wonderful for spring birding and did not disappoint us in July. We saw Blue-headed, Yellow-throated, Red-eyed, and White-eyed Vireos, Scarlet Tanagers, Woodpeckers, Towhees, and more. Chinsegut Nature Center has picnic tables where we sat and watched Sandhill Cranes eating from bird feeders with Chickadees and Cardinals. We found Blue Grosbeaks on our drive home.

END OF JULY: Alexander Springs in Ocala National Forest.

We heard Yellow-billed Cuckoos, saw many young Carolina Wrens and Red-bellied Woodpeckers. We ate lunch at the picnic tables at Mill Dam Recreation Area finding Towhees, juvenile Northern Parulas, Carolina Wrens, Red-bellied and Pileated Woodpeckers en route. We stopped at Juniper Springs Recreation Area.

EARLY AUGUST: Kanapaha Gardens in Gainesville

Mississippi Kites that were being reported. Magnificent gardens and, sure enough, the Mississippi Kites were soaring overhead. Soon after this trip I saw The Villages' first ever Mississippi Kite near the VA Hospital off of 42 behind Publix, soaring over the fields.

MID AUGUST: Hernando County

Searching for Burrowing Owls. We had many Meadowlarks, Kestrels and other raptors, but no Owls. We saw Manatees at Linda Pederson Park. On our way home we encountered 25 Swallow-tail Kites on Rt. 229 off of 466, just above us. WOW, was that something!

LATE AUGUST: Sawgrass Lake Park and Boyd Hill Nature Preserve in St. Petersburg

Not seeing many birds, we went to Fort De Soto and on the causeway we saw at least 135 Magnificent Frigatebirds soaring over our heads, so close we could almost touch them. Incredible!

END OF AUGUST: Sabal Bluff, in Leesburg

Warblers were being reported. On those two days we had many Northern Parulas, American Redstarts, Prairie, Hooded, Worm-eating, and Yellow-throated Warblers, Red-eyed, Blue-headed, and Yellow-throated Vireos, Great-crested Flycatchers and Eastern Wood-Pewees.

Alice Horst

Odello

Beneath the glassy stare of the elephant, framed by the zebra print curtain, Odello battles his imaginary Iago. No, this is not Shakespeare; it's the Odell Village Recreation Center mascot. For the past three months, like clockwork, a male cardinal has appeared at the recreation center window during morning aerobics. He flutters up and down, pecking at his reflection, bungee jumping on bamboo branches and providing entertainment and distraction as we sweat away the pounds.

Many in the room believe Odello comes to watch our workouts. As you well know, birds are territorial, particularly during breeding season, and Odello is simply defending his turf. The Internet is loaded with strategies for deterring window pecking. But no one (or nothing) seems as appreciative of our efforts as Odello. He's showing up less frequently, as his young have probably fledged, and we will miss him when he's gone.

Karen Martin

Fall Events

Club activities will resume in October. Walks, meetings, and other events are not yet finalized. The complete fall calendar will be in the September issue of Cheep Talk.

Our 4th Annual Birder's Picnic

The weather was absolutely perfect as 46 birders enjoyed our picnic at Lake Panasoffkee Wildlife Management Area on April 10. A large group arrived early, around 8:00 am, to bird the area. We wandered around the pavilion and then walked down the gravel road towards the wetlands. Forty-nine species were reported including many Red-headed and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Bluebirds, Meadowlarks (singing), an Orchard Oriole, and a pair of Summer Tanagers. We saw Swallow-tailed Kites at a distance while we were eating and two of them swooped down right over our heads at the edge of the pavilion to signal the end of the picnic. Apparently everyone was so excited to see the Kites so close that no one managed to take a photo.

Thank you all for coming and helping and bringing your favorite dishes!

See you next year.

Alice Horst

Welcome New Members

Dr. Robert Gillon
Ralph & Gretchen
Goldsworthy

Angela Miller
Mike & Kathy Schauff



Northern Parula by Paul Nistico

Cheep Talk
310 San Marino Dr.
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