

The Village Birders

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A Visit to STA-5

On December 4th a carload of us drove down to Stormwater Treatment Area # 5 (STA-5) in Clewiston, 230 miles south of The Villages, approximately a four hour drive. This treatment



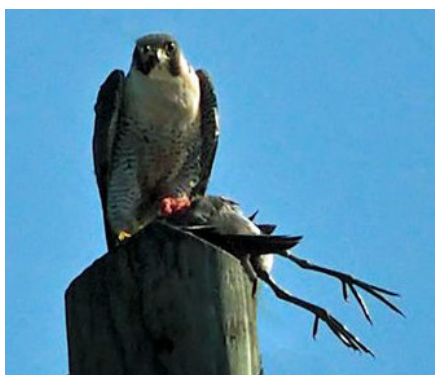
Flying Black-crowned Night-heron

area was constructed to filter agricultural runoff from water destined for the Everglades.

This complex of water impoundment cells is an impressive refuge for birds and a mecca for birders during the winter months. The storm water treatment areas, owned and operated by the South

Florida Water Management District, are constructed wetlands that use vegetation to naturally cleanse excess nutrients from water before it enters the Everglades. These remote, shallow-water marshes attract many species of nesting wading birds, migratory and other waterfowl such as Great Blue Herons, Wood Storks, Snowy Egrets, Great Egrets and Roseate Spoonbills.

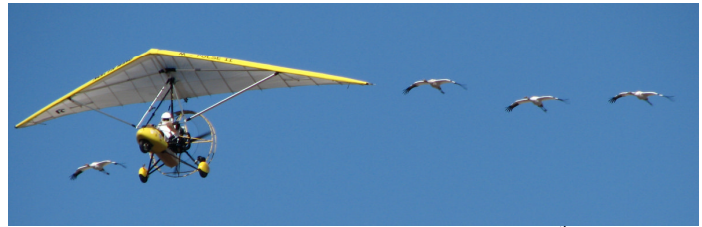
Our best sightings were six Peregrine Falcons (one eating his lunch of a probable Moorhen), more than thirty Purple Swampheens, Roseate Spoonbills, and Black-crowned Night Herons. The drive there and back made for a very long day, but it was well worth it. The total tally for the day was 93 species. If you are interested in learning more about STA-5 and their tours go to www.hendrygladesaudubon.org



Peregrine Falcon Eating a Moorhen

Alice Horst

Arrival of the Whooping Cranes



The third time was charm. On January 14th, after two unsuccessful early morning drives to Dunellen Airport, **Charlie and Karen Martin** braved the 35 degree temperature to witness the arrival of five Whooping Crane chicks. Operation Migration successfully led the flock of endangered birds to their wintering site at Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge in Citrus County after delighting an enthusiastic crowd, which also included **Kris St. Germaine**, with an airport fly-over.

The crane's journey began on October 10th, 2010 in central Wisconsin's Necedah National Wildlife Refuge where ultralight pilots dressed in crane costumes guided ten Whooping Crane chicks 1,285-miles to Florida. Five birds were placed at the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge in Wakulla County, Florida on December 15th. Adverse weather conditions and a Christmas break delayed the journey's completion for the Chassahowitzka five.

The Whooping Crane, found only in North America, is the continent's tallest bird. According to Operation Migration, by the 1940's only fifteen remained in the wild. Early attempts to preserve the species through captive breeding and Sandhill Crane foster parenting met with failure. Preservationists recognized the risk of having only one wild migratory flock that summers in Canada's Wood Buffalo National Park and winters in Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, Texas. In 2001 Operation Migration began a program of imprinting chicks on humans dressed in "crane suits" and training them to follow ultralight planes on a new migratory route east of the Mississippi. Through conservation efforts the number of migrating Whooping Cranes is approximately 570 with about 400 of those in the wild.

As the ultralights and birds appeared over the treetops, the crowd was asked to express its enthusiasm silently, not an easy task. It was a thrilling sight. The birds are magnificent, but so are the human pilots who risk all for the survival of the Whooping Crane. For information on Operation Migration check their website at: <http://www.operationmigration.org/>

Karen Martin

My First Village Birders Walk

It was a cool, misty, and overcast morning as I was trying to find my way to the “Belk parking lot” to join the Village Birders on my first walk. I was excited and looking forward to it. I arrived in The Villages in early January and I was missing my daily bird visitors to my feeders in Stoneham, Massachusetts. As I parked my car in the lot I noticed the small groups of birders chatting and cradling steaming drinks in their hands. Paul (the leader, I later found out) introduced himself to me. Many members also introduced themselves to me and made me feel welcome.

Paul invited Phyllis and me to car pool with the group to our first stop at Sabal Bluff. The birding was quiet. Paul was surprised that there had been a controlled burn, only a few days before, which seemed to have impacted the birds. One highlight for me was a Ruby-crowned Kinglet that was displaying. I was surprised that the red crown is larger than it usually appears. As we walked I enjoyed hearing stories from members about good birding venues in this area.

Our next stop was Herlong Park. As the cars were parking we spotted a Limpkin perched on a handrail. What a great look at a life bird for me!!! There were also great looks at what I call “Florida Herons.” The Tricolored and Little Blue Herons, as well as the Ibis, are rarely seen in Massachusetts. There was also a wonderful tree filled with Vireos and Warblers.

For me it was better than chocolate. I was so appreciative that Paul and the group were patient and helpful enabling me to finally see a Yellow-throated Warbler. When I checked my list I found that it is another life bird for me. Two in one day pretty exciting!!

Our last stop was Venetian Gardens. There were about twenty or so Purple Gallinules, really close for good observation. I also enjoyed seeing the Wood Stork that was close to shore. I was surprised that the morning had gone by so quickly. A group of us stopped for lunch at Bob Evans where we enjoyed sharing more bird stories.

I have the birding walks scheduled on my calendar and eagerly look forward to more adventures with the Village Birders, a fun and knowledgeable group.

Charlotte Conway

In Praise of Birding

To be on a bluff on the shore or in the forest, and in the midst of bird watchers who know my avian friends by sight, song and silhouette is an exhilarating experience. I have always enjoyed bird watching but at one time the difference between a Grackle and a Starling, or between a Palm Warbler and a Prairie Warbler, was less important than just seeing them! Since joining the Village Birders my appreciation, and hopefully my knowledge, will further develop. Certainly my interest has been tweaked and I thoroughly enjoy every walk while always looking up.

Elaine Kersey

Games

Do you like to play games? Birders do! We make lists! We not only like watching birds but we move from watching to naming to listing. Then before we know it there are many lists: yard, county, state, region and then there’s the walk, trip, year list, etc.

I think my favorite list is my wanted list which contains my most sought after birds. The first entries in this list are my top ten most wanted birds, followed by all the other birds that I have never seen. Those are the birds that have become my nemesis or I just haven’t been at the right place at the right time. I have been chasing some of these birds for many years and in multiple states. We all have our own top ten wanted list.

When I get a lifer (not so easy any more) I’m ecstatic, but when I get one from my top ten wanted list I’m out of control. Playing these games keeps us excited since whether you are a beginning birder or a seasoned one there are always goals to reach. If you are doing a year list you get to start fresh each year. So enjoy your games and remember, you don’t need another player to play solitaire. Have Fun!

Barb Gay

Spring Events

The Annual Meeting on March 26th will feature a Photo Contest. Get those cameras clicking and bring best, funniest or most interesting bird photos. Many of our birders are also outstanding photographers but don’t despair! We have included some innovative categories such as: Baby birds, Funniest, Action Shot, Mealtime, Bird/human interaction, and Best in Show. Photos must be printed, any size. Matting or framing is not required.

During March we will be visiting Fort Cooper State Park, PEAR Park, Inglis Dam (special event) and Withlacoochee Bay Trail.

April will begin with the annual picnic and birding on April 10th (see more information on page 4). April trips will include Wood Duck Drive, Potts Preserve, Bay Road subdivision, and Moss Bluff rookery. **Fred Dietrich** will give a presentation on hummingbirds at the April 23rd meeting.

The last trip of the season will be to the Gatorland rookery in May.

Cheep Talk

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Birding Buffalo Ridge

The heavy rains in early February flooded the fields at Buffalo Ridge, just west of the Bealls parking lot. **Kris St. Germain** gathered a group of birders to meet there at 8:00 am on February 8th. **Al Rousch** reported that "There were birds everywhere. Probably more than 100 Wilson's Snipe, flocks of American Pipits and an uncountable number of Killdeer. There were shorebirds also along with a mix of other species. We tallied 68 species before noon." **John Affleck** memorialized the morning in poetry.

Buffalo Ridge Birding

Today I smelled and breathed spring in the air
Black Angus cattle in field shared their lair
Lasts night's rain filled low areas this day
Cars passed by with people somehow blasé

Birds all about feeding in soft mud grounds
An American Pipit grass playground
A hundred Snipes feeding and hunched down low
Striking Killdeer putting on quite a show

Noisy, shiny, Boat-tailed Grackles' loud cries
Much like one despicable Captain Bligh
Two *Sturnus vulgaris*, Affleck called out
Marcy spied some Collared-Doves thereabout

The "bright eyes" of Donna failed her this day
But, in the distance heard Meadowlarks' play
Kris spotted Greater, Lesser Yellowlegs
Barb grasped her scopes saying mumblety-peg

Off in the distance we could hear Al count
One hundred, two, a sizable amount
We need photos this day, so truly great
To show dear Alice, we didn't misstate
(Who the heck is Alice?)

John A. Affleck, Village Poet/Birder/Humorist

The One That Got Away

Amazing things happen on the golf course. We were playing the 16th hole at Cane Garden. The fairway is lined on the right with large oaks. As our foursome neared the green we noticed that two Bald Eagles were perched at the top of one of one of the trees. As we were putting, a Snowy Egret came out of the trees flying directly at us and within seconds the two Eagles came diving down in pursuit of the Egret. They were an adult and an immature which was apparently learning to hunt. The three were circling and diving not more than twenty to thirty feet directly above us.

With one quick maneuver the Egret headed for and landed next to our cart on the cart path as the Eagles continued to circle around. As we walked to the cart, amazingly, and without hesitation, the Egret jumped into the cart. We both got in with the Egret calmly settled between us on the floor. As the three of us proceeded to the next hole the stowaway jumped out of the cart and flew off. We all gave a thumbs-up to the ingenuity of this little white bird and to the wonders of nature. Chalk up one for the little ones.

Bob Hansen

Flocking to Circle B Bar Reserve

The 1,267 acre Circle B Bar cattle ranch was jointly acquired by the Polk County Environmental Lands Program and Southwest Florida Water Management District to protect the floodplain of Lake Hancock and to restore the Banana Creek marsh system which runs through the center of the property. Much of the property had previously been converted to pasture, but in 2005 and 2006 restoration projects were completed to restore much of the original hydrologic function of the lands.

As a result of the marsh system restoration project Circle B Bar Reserve is now home to some of the most impressive bird activity on District property. The tremendous bird population includes a variety of wading birds, waterfowl, Ospreys and Bald Eagles. Oak hammock, freshwater marsh, hardwood swamp and the lakeshore are among the unique characteristics of this property. Lake Hancock is the fourth largest lake in Polk County. Construction of the Polk County Nature Discovery Center was completed in November 2008. The center, which is managed by the Polk County Natural Resources Department, is open to the public and provides educational opportunities for Polk County public schools. There are exhibits in the center that display environmental and hydrologic functions of Florida's natural resources. Nature trails, a pavilion, and informational signs are located on the grounds adjacent to the center.

Last January, after seeing many bird reports from Circle B Bar Reserve in Polk County, I decided to drive 1½ hours to



Limpkin Eating Apple Snail

see for myself. The sight of hundreds of White Pelicans, dozens of Roseate Spoonbills, a couple of Bald Eagles, Black-crowned Night-herons, and American Bitterns was enough for me to want to share this wintering bird paradise with my fellow birders. This past January fifteen of us went to Circle B Bar Reserve in Lakeland. It was a very cold day but the birds, needing to eat, were out and about. We saw, incredibly, hundreds of circling White Pelicans in the blue sky. We watched a "flock" of 30 to 40 Limpkins feeding on huge Apple Snails. Wilson's Snipe, Herons, Ibis, and Egrets were abundant. A Peregrine Falcon posed for all of us nearby. Gadwalls, Widgeons, and Pintails were among the ducks we saw. We had 76 species of birds that cold day. One of our best sightings was a very cooperative Sora so busily eating he didn't even hear our cameras clicking ten feet away.

Alice Horst

Welcome New Members

Charlotte Conway	Penny Radice
Alex Cunningham	Joan C. Rake
Phyllis Davis	Ron Reif & Carol Sylvia
Jane & George Diven	Diane & Gary Robbins
Jackie & Philip Galloway	Jerry Schwartz
Betty McLeod	Mary & Norm Swanson
Tim & Janet Murtaugh	Ken Thibault
Kathy Osberg	Pearl Watkins
Prudi Platt	Vicky Whelan
Carol Pozen	Elaine Wonsavage

Membership Dues

Annual membership dues were payable by January 1st for 2011. The membership list will be purged on March 15th and, if your dues have not yet been paid, you will be removed from the email and mailing lists. If your address label says "MEMBERSHIP EXPIRED – LAST ISSUE," your dues have not been paid for this year. Dues are \$5 for an individual and \$2 for each additional household member. You can renew at the February 26th meeting or by mail. To renew by mail send your check payable to the "Village Birders" to:

Kathy Porter
310 San Marino Drive
The Villages, FL 32159

Annual Picnic

Our fourth Annual Birder's Picnic will be on Sunday April 10th at Lake Panasoffkee Recreation Area on SR 44, less than ten miles from The Villages. Our biggest social event has grown every year because of the wonderful food and camaraderie. Last year sixty people attended. The club supplies hotdogs and brats, cooked on grills with perfection by Chefs Norton and Finkbiner. Please bring a dish to share, salads or desserts, and bring your own drinks. No alcohol is allowed at the park. We plan on eating around 11:00 - 11:30.

Some of us show up around 8:00 am to have an informal bird search. Bring your binocs and scopes. We hope to see Red-headed Woodpeckers, Bachman's Sparrows and who knows what else.

Directions: CR 466 west to CR 475 and over I-75 to SR 44. Right on SR 44 about one mile. Watch for brown Great Florida Birding Trail sign on right. Turn left onto Jones Creek Road (a gravel road) straight to picnic area, pavilion and rest rooms. Any questions you can call Alice Horst at 751-6943, Marcy Klepinger at 259-4754, or Kris St. Germaine at 259-3685.
SEE YOU THEN!!

Alice

Cheep Talk
310 San Marino Dr.
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