

The Village Birders Club is Ending

March 21, 2026

Today was the final meeting of the season for The Villages Birders, which we normally have this month. It was also the final meeting ever. The Village Birders, as a club, is dissolving. Here is our reasoning:

- Having formed in February, 2001, our club has been in existence for over 25 years, which is an amazing feat for an official club in The Villages.
- At its peak, we had nearly 300 members and some meetings would have well over 100 attendees.
- The COVID-19 epidemic caused us to stop having meetings and birding walks for some time, then forced us to have only Zoom meetings for a while. After the epidemic was officially over, attendance of both meetings and walks dropped significantly.
- Our next challenge was being required to leave our original home at the Paradise recreation center as it was to be demolished and rebuilt. Our move south gave us a lovely, if somewhat light-challenged location, but cost us additional members and attendees as many of our aging original members weren't up to the longer drive to the meetings.
- Our next challenge was the formation of a new birding club, the Brownwood Birders. For many people, the presentations offered at the monthly meetings was every bit as good as those offered by The Villages Birders and their emphasis on walks almost exclusively inside The Villages was more appealing than the trips outside The Villages that was offered by The Village Birders. A number of people chose to be active members in both clubs. However, the Brownwood Birders club has grown rapidly while The Village Birders membership has continuously declined.
- The attendance at our meetings has dropped to the point where The Villages Recreation Department has approached us about moving to smaller meeting venues.
- Similarly, the attendance to our birding walks, whether inside or outside The Villages, has similarly declined with sometimes only 3 or 4 people showing up.
- Despite repeated calls for people to volunteer to run for the various offices in the club as our current term is expiring, we were met with silence. In addition, several current officers (some of which have held the office multiple times) have elected not to run again. We simply don't have candidates for all of the needed positions.

Because of this, we are forced to the conclusion that The Village Birders, as a club, no longer meets the needs of a large enough number of Villagers to continue as a club.

Please note that the remaining scheduled walks posted on The Village Birders website (<https://www.villagebirders.org/>) will go on as scheduled. As always, please check the website for any changes.

We have several remaining business items to perform before the end of the club, including:

- We will be updating the web page and the Facebook pages to reflect the dissolution of the club.
- We will be donating the balance of our funds to Rescue Ocala Wildlife (R.O.W.)
- We have purchased some items for our use over the years and had some items donated to us
 - o The two Weber-Go-Anywhere grills we bought for picnics were donated to Ye Olde Thrift Shop in Lady Lake (whose proceeds go to The Villages Hospital)
 - o The Epson video projector we purchased to use at Paradise was donated to the Florida Bat Conservancy
 - o A donated 2nd Edition of Audubon's Birds of America by Roger Tory Peterson and Virginia Marie Peterson will be donated to Eckerd College in St. Petersburg
- We will maintain the Village Birders GoogleGroups email group through the end of the summer.
- After the currently scheduled walks, there will be no more organized walks by The Village Birders. However, members of the email group can use it to let other former Village Birders members know if they are planning on birding on particular dates at particular locations and email recipients can choose to contact them or simply show up to bird along with them.
- Come fall, we will disband the Village Birders GoogleGroups email group and perhaps (if the interest is there), create a new one for those actively interested in birding outside of The Villages.

Members who enjoy presentations about birding and other nature topics and birding within The Villages with fairly large groups can join Brownwood Birders (if they haven't already one so).

It is sad to see the club go away, but everything has its time.

I want to thank the present and former officers and committee chairs of The Village Birders for doing all the work of creating and running the club for 25 years. The current officers include:

- Jerry Bell (President, Email Management and Sock Puppeteer)
- Susan Pepper (Vice President)
- Marlene Armstrong (Secretary and Bird Walks & Special Events)
- Barb Peterson (Treasurer)
- Alice Horst (Program & Education)
- Bob Martin (Web Site)
- Bob Cole (Archivist)
- Paul Nistico & Gary Babic (Nominating Committee)
- Bob Smidt (Outdoor Expo)

Several of these folks have held multiple offices and held offices for multiple terms. All of them (and so many others) have led bird walks, especially Alice Horst who lead a bazillion of them.

We want to thank all the presenters who have come to us and shared their knowledge and passion on birds, birding, nature and related topics.

We also want to thank those of you who attended today, those who attended past meetings and those who have joined us over the years in our birdwatching walks inside and outside The Villages.

Thank you.

Jerry L. Bell
President, The Village Birders