



February 2009 & March 2009

Habitat Fragmentation and Wildlife Conservation

By Marianne Korosy

Many of us recently participated in Christmas Bird Counts and searched for a variety of bird species in fragmented patches of wildlife habitat. In suburban Pinellas County the search for King Rails, Soras, Least Bitterns, Marsh Wrens, American Coots, and dabbling ducks often takes us to storm-water detention ponds while diving ducks and gulls frequent the local sewage treatment plant. We search woodlots for warblers and titmice, ball fields for shrikes and phoebes, and brushy margins of the Pinellas Trail for Brown Thrashers, White-eyed Vireos, and Northern Cardinals. This is what's left of wildlife habitat in suburbia.



Grasshopper Sparrow, Photo Courtesy of Judy Fisher

Habitat loss followed by increasing isolation of the smaller remaining habitat patches is the greatest single threat to wildlife on planet Earth right now – and a more immediate threat than global climate change. Most wildlife species suffer progressive population declines as ponds, fields, and woodlots become isolated patches in an urbanizing landscape. For animals unable to fly, the matrix of buildings and pavement between habitat patches is hostile territory where attempted road crossings claim them. When young birds do survive the perils of road-crossings and free-roaming cats to find adequate food they have increasing difficulty finding mates and unoccupied habitat in which to take up residence and raise their own offspring.

Animals differ in their life-history strategies and these differences can make them vulnerable to the pressures of habitat fragmentation. Categories of fragmentation-sensitive species are:

- Area-limited (large home ranges, low density) species, such as Florida panthers and Roseate spoonbills;
- Dispersal-limited species, such as frogs, salamanders and flightless insects;
- Resource-limited species (i.e. ecological specialists), such as Snail Kite, Florida Scrub Jays, and Bachman's Sparrows;
- Naturally rare species, such as the Florida Grasshopper Sparrow, the ghost orchid, and the Florida bog frog;
- "Interior", edge-avoiding species, such as Ovenbird, Hermit Thrush, Kentucky Warbler, and Henslow's Sparrow; and,
- Species vulnerable to human exploitation or persecution, such as Scarlet Macaw, Ivory-billed Woodpecker, and Carolina Parakeet.

Each of these categories will be examined in more detail in future editions of the Wing beat to "bring home" themes of conservation biology relevant to our everyday lives in Pinellas County.

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Wing Beat

February 2009 & March 2009

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Clearwater Audubon Society serves all of North Pinellas.

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February Speaker

Our February speaker is Florida Writer, Naturalist and Activist - *Susan Cerulean*

Susan's nature memoir, *Tracking Desire: A Journey After Swallow-tailed Kites*, was named Editors' Choice by Audubon magazine, & landed Cerulean the Florida Chapter of the Sierra Club's annual nature writing award in December 2005. Susan has written & advocated on behalf of Florida & its wildlife from her home in Tallahassee since 1981. She designed the state's Nongame & Watchable Wildlife programs, & was named Environmental Educator of the Year by the Governor's Council for a Sustainable Florida in 1997.

Susan is also the writer of *Wildlife 2060: What's at stake for Florida?* The report, issued by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, intends to help us understand the changes that population doubling over the next 50 years may have on Florida's fish and wildlife and our own lifestyles. The report covers habitat loss, habitat isolation, coastal challenges, water quality and quantity, wildlife and human interactions, and access to land and water within our state. View the full report online- <http://myfwc.com/wildlife2060/Docs/FWC2060.pdf>.



Swallow-tailed Kite, Photo Courtesy of Barbara Walker

Clearwater Audubon Society

Hosts

S u s a n C e r u l e a n

February 2, 2009

Mix and Mingle 7:00pm

Public Program 7:30pm

Moccasin Lake Nature Park

2750 Park Trail Lane

Clearwater, Florida 33759

727-462-6024

KITE WATCH!

If you are interested in participating in Kite Watch please contact Barbara Walker at 727-789-0183. We will meet in mid-February to review last year's check points. This year we will be surveying areas on the Anclote River and Brooker Creek Preserve.

Bird Education Network

The Council for Environmental Education, Flying WILD and the Bird Education Network are hosting Bird Education through Conservation: A National Gathering in Jekyll Island February 22-26. As we are planning this event we are reaching out to educators and organizations and we would like to invite as many Audubon Chapters from Florida as possible to join us.

This week-long bird education and conservation conference will be held from February 22 - 26, 2009 at the Jekyll Island Club Hotel located along the Colonial Coast Birding Trail in Georgia. By bringing together leaders from government agencies, conservation organizations, zoos, aquariums, nature centers, Audubon centers, businesses, universities, K-12 schools, NGOs, non-profit groups and others, this event provides a unique opportunity for educators and bird professionals to network and exchange ideas about best practices for educating the public about bird conservation. This event also features an impressive lineup of guest speakers including Kenn Kaufman and Don and Lillian Stokes.

BEN (Bird Education Network) is the newest initiative of the Council for Environmental Education and it seeks to connect and support the community of bird education professionals. Through the BEN supported Bird Education Listserv, over 500 individuals representing 300 organizations, are connected to advance bird education.

More information about the conference can be found on the conference registration packet which is available at http://www.birdeducation.org/documents/JekyllRegistrationPacketweb_000.pdf.

Conference goals include:

- 1) Providing relevant professional development opportunities for participants
- 2) Launching a national campaign to develop bird education best practices by sharing effective approaches to bird education through presentations, the Educator's Share Fair, and interactive discussions
- 3) Promoting the inclusion of diverse audiences as a priority goal within bird education
- 4) Elevating the significance of bird education as a key component in both international bird conservation efforts and the national "No Child Left Inside" movement
- 5) Disseminating the National Bird Education Strategy and highlight critical bird conservation messages

109th Christmas Bird Count

By Donna Malloy

As a reporter and fellow bird enthusiast, I jumped at the chance to participate in Clearwater Audubon's Christmas Bird Count for 2008 on December 21st. Before today, I considered myself fairly proficient at identifying a number of bird species, such as cardinal, blue jay, red-headed woodpecker, mockingbird, black skimmer, mourning dove, osprey and cormorant, but I was also anxious to learn more.

8:15 a.m. Jumping on board, a handful of volunteers depart from Dana and Harvey Kerstein's boat dock and head (very fast I might add) toward Dunedin to pick up the rest of the volunteers.

8:30 a.m. Dressed in everything from L.L.Bean gear to jeans, the balance of the volunteers load onto the boat in single file; our destination in sight: Caladesi Island State Park.

9:00 a.m. At the concession stand at Caladesi Island, Dana divides us into three groups; Northern, Southern and Trail Group.

9:15 a.m. I decide to join the Southern Group based on the amount of equipment Frank, our team leader, is carrying. As Frank balances his spotting scope and tripod on his left shoulder, his binoculars hang from his neck and his field guide is tucked in one of many of his pants pockets, ready to grab and reference at a moment's notice.

9:20 a.m. The team hits the sand. Frank enthusiastically cases sand, sea and sky for species. Wife Linda follows at his side, pen and list in hand, ready to mark the type and number of species they find.

"There's a pair of American Oystercatchers in their winter plumage" he states. "This is a male and a female and they are already paired to mate in the spring." A lone jogger, oblivious of the American Oystercatchers, runs by. The birds move closer to the shoreline, but do not fly away. "They're fairly habituated," Frank further explains.

And thus the day commences.

11:30 a.m. Satisfied that we had located all the migrating and local birds for the 109th Christmas Bird Count, the team turned and headed North. Plastic bags in hand, they now looked down, ready to pick up trash on the way back to the concession stand.

11:40 a.m. I was amazed that after only three hours, I could now identify more than 17 different species. I also realized that you don't have to be an ornithologist to have fun and get involved in Audubon activities.

So, if you have a desire to learn the difference between a Laughing Gull and a Ring-billed Gull, go to: clearwateraudubon.org. for more information.

P.S. Frank and Linda's second date was "bird watching" according to Linda. They have been happily married for the last 29 years and counting.

Donna Malloy is a contributing writer for the Clearwater Gazette and recently published her children's book "Criss Crow, Flying on Sunshine." For more information, go to: www.floridabluejay.com

Shorebird Classes – 2009 - St. Petersburg Audubon Society

3 classes will be starting in February and continuing in March to help you learn how to identify the major wintering shorebirds found on Pinellas County beaches. Dates will be Feb 7th, March 7th and March 15th. Classes will be held on these dates from 8 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. at Ft. DeSoto Park.

Bring Field Guide and Binoculars. We will have several scopes to provide close up viewing.

Leaders: John Ogden and Maureen Arnold.
Other knowledgeable St. Petersburg Audubon members will provide scope views and expertise.

For cost, questions or to reserve your spot contact:
Maureen Arnold at 727-577-0448 or email maureenarn@ij.net
Proceeds to benefit St. Petersburg Audubon Society



Oystercatcher, Photo Courtesy of M. McPherson

Avian Research

By Gina Zimmerman

The Avian Research and Conservation Institute (ARCI) Research Director Ken Meyer works on the ecology and behavior of wild birds with the goal of supporting and informing conservation planning. ARCI focuses on species and communities that are considered rare, vulnerable, and good bioindicators of ecosystem health. Representative projects include:

- Conservation of critical stop-over and wintering sites for trans-equatorial migrations of Swallow-tailed Kites
- Demography, genetics, ecology and management recommendations for Swallow-tailed Kites nesting on timberlands of the southeastern U.S.
- Nesting and wintering ecology of the extremely rare Short-tailed Hawk in Florida
- The decline of the Great White Heron in Florida: Eplanations and recommendations for recovery of this small and highly vulnerable population

ARCI is seeking help in finding Swallow-tailed Kite and Short-tailed Hawk nesting activity. You can help by reporting any observations that may suggest nesting, such as repeated sightings of birds in wooded habitats, vocalizations, birds carrying nest material or food, copulations, nest building, etc. These studies are funded by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and private foundations.

The nests will be used to guide demographic modeling, predictions of population trends, site fidelity, and management action in the rapidly-changing landscape where the remaining kites and hawks nest.

Short-tailed Hawk sightings should be reported directly to zimmerman@arcinst.org.

To report Swallow-tailed Kite sightings, please fill in the report form at the South Carolina Center for Birds of Prey website: www.thecenterforbirdsofprey.org or to zimmerman@arcinst.org. On the website you'll see a "Click here for the Swallow-tailed Kite Study" in the left hand column. *Thank you very much for your help. Ken Meyer, Gina Zimmerman, ARCI, Gainesville, Florida.*

Sixth Annual Audubon Garage Sale

Sat 3/21 8am-1pm

1583 Budleigh St, Clearwater, 33756

We need donations, volunteers and shoppers! If you would like to donate items, volunteer to help price or help on the day of the sale please call **Debbie Trunk 727-458-9997**

The Abbott Nest – Part II Dancing on the Dock

By Barb Walker

Tarpon Springs, October 2008 – Between October 2nd and October 11th, Joe Zarolinski and I teamed up to survey the Anclote River bald eagle scene. The first time we arrived at Dr. Abbott's home we were greeted with astonishing news. Dr. Shaun Abbott, an excellent physician, an Irishman, and in his final year, a devoted eagle watcher and activist had passed away. The family asked us to continue our work because it was what Dr. Abbott would have wanted.

Joe and I walked onto the pier that extends into the Anclote River. As I was quickly maneuvering the scope Joe was recommending we set up the scope. Both of our eyes had been instantaneously drawn to a large nest in a live pine 1,746 feet to the southwest along the Anclote River. We knew it looked like an eagle nest and that both eagles and osprey were seen in the area.

In the following days Joe visited the site early in the morning from different vantage points and observed bald eagles on the territory. We had strong indication this was indeed the eerie of an eagle. Early in the morning on October 11th I checked the nest and saw two bald eagles in the nest. I was dancing on the dock at sunrise. Thank goodness Wal-Mart's presentation on September 22nd had delayed all public comment. We now had two bald eagles to help speak for the public interest. The twist of fate must have been the luck of the Irish! We finally found the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. I should have danced a jig. At that point Mathew Poling drove in from Gainesville and assisted with photo documenting and estimating GPS coordinates for "The Abbott Nest."

The nest was reported to Lynda White at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey and Fish and Wildlife was contacted. On October 15th FWC sent out two wildlife biologists who verified the nest as an active bald eagle nest. The "Abbott Nest" was given the designation P1950. On October 16th public comment was heard. At a following meeting the City Commission of Tarpon Springs voted that Wal-Mart's Certificate of Concurrency had expired and new traffic studies and environmental studies were needed. Wal-Mart has since discontinued plans to build on the sensitive property which is home to the pair of bald eagles. The situation with the Wal-Mart bald eagles drew attention to the further need of conservation efforts for bald eagles and spurred an enhanced monitoring effort. **To learn more about bald eagles, the history of bald eagles in Pinellas County and the amazing year bald eagles are having in Pinellas County this year join us at our regular meeting on March 2nd for an exciting presentation. Or contact Barb Walker at 789-0183.**

Join the Great Backyard Bird Count Count for Fun, Count for the Future February 13-16, 2009

New York, NY and Ithaca, NY-Bird and nature fans throughout North America are invited to join tens of thousands of everyday bird watchers for the 12th annual **Great Backyard Bird Count** (GBBC), February 13-16, 2009. A joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, this **free event** is an opportunity for families, students, and people of all ages to discover the wonders of nature in backyards, schoolyards, and local parks, and, at the same time, make an important contribution to conservation. Participants count birds and report their sightings online at www.birdcount.org.

“The Great Backyard Bird Count benefits both birds and people. It’s a great example of citizen science: Anyone who can identify even a few species can contribute to the body of knowledge that is used to inform conservation efforts to protect birds and biodiversity,” said Audubon Education VP, Judy Braus. “Families, teachers, children and all those who take part in GBBC get a chance to improve their observation skills, enjoy nature, and have a great time counting for fun, counting for the future.”

Anyone can take part, from novice bird watchers to experts, by counting birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the event and reporting their sightings online at www.birdcount.org. Participants can also explore what birds others are finding in their backyards-whether in their own neighborhood or thousands of miles away. Additional online resources include tips to help identify birds, a photo gallery, and special materials for educators.

The data these “citizen scientists” collect helps researchers understand bird population trends, information that is critical for effective conservation. Their efforts enable everyone to see what would otherwise be impossible: a comprehensive picture of where birds are in late winter and how their numbers and distribution compare with previous years. In 2008, participants submitted more than 85,000 checklists.

“The GBBC has become a vital link in the arsenal of continent-wide bird-monitoring projects,” said Cornell Lab of Ornithology director, John Fitzpatrick. “With more than a decade of data now in hand, the GBBC has documented the fine-grained details of late-winter bird distributions better than any project in history, including some truly striking changes just over the past decade.”

Each year, in addition to entering their tallies, participants submit thousands of digital images for the GBBC photo contest. Many are featured in the popular online gallery. Participants in the 2009 count are also invited to upload their bird videos to YouTube; some will also be featured on the GBBC web site. Visit www.birdcount.org to learn more.

Businesses, schools, nature clubs, Scout troops, and other community organizations interested in the GBBC can contact the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at (800) 843-2473 (outside the U.S., call (607) 254-2473), or Audubon at citizenscience@audubon.org or (215) 355-9588, ext 16. The Great Backyard Bird Count is made possible, in part, by support from **Wild Birds Unlimited**.

Project Osprey Cam Update

Power was lost to the camera and could not be re-established as the osprey had quickly returned and laid 3 eggs. The camera is expected to go live in October of 2009.

The osprey shown in the picture at right was photographed at the home of the Osprey Cam, St. Andrews Links in Dunedin during the Christmas Bird Count.

While many ospreys have returned to their nests, some nests remain unoccupied until late January.



Osprey Photo Courtesy of Barbara Walker

Clearwater Audubon Society Membership Application

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To ensure you receive our electronic newsletter please fill in your email address, if you do not have email please call 727-442-9140 to request a paper copy.

Which membership category? Chapter @ \$15/year _____ National @ \$20/year _____

Please enclose check to Clearwater Audubon Society for Chapter membership, or National Audubon Society for National membership

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 Clearwater, FL 33757
 Attention: Barbara MacDonald, Membership Chair

How can you help Clearwater Audubon Society achieve its Purpose? [check all that apply]

advocacy ___ conservation ___ education ___ field trips ___ finance ___ hospitality ___
 media/PR ___ membership ___ newsletter ___ investment security ___ other ___ [list below]

When can you help Clearwater Audubon Society achieve its purpose? [check all that apply]

am _____ SUN pm _____ nite _____	am _____ MON pm _____ nite _____	am _____ TUE pm _____ nite _____	am _____ WED pm _____ nite _____
am _____ THU pm _____ nite _____	am _____ FRI pm _____ nite _____	am _____ SAT pm _____ nite _____	am _____ HOD pm _____ nite _____

If not a Florida resident, which months of the year are you available?

From _____ To _____

Any other information about you that will help Clearwater Audubon Society achieve its purpose:

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WHAT IS THE CLEARWATER AUDUBON SOCIETY?

Our purpose is embodied in our motto:

Conservation through education & our activities include:

- protection of nesting, wintering and migrating birds through Project Colony Watch, rescue of chicks fallen from rooftop nests, Project Eagle Watch, and participation in the county-wide beach nesting bird survey;
- education, including Audubon Adventures for elementary school students, environmental education scholarships for teachers and students, free birding classes for the public, and a speakers bureau;
- sponsorship of projects at local nature parks;
- field trips to prime birding locations in Florida, throughout the United States and internationally;
- monthly meetings held October through May featuring speakers on a wide array of environment-related topics;
- participation in bird surveys, which provide data for vital ornithological research;
- participation in local nature festivals;
- publication of our bimonthly newsletter, Wingbeat, and our website, at ClearwaterAudubon.org;
- advocacy at the local, state and national levels.

YOU CAN HELP!

Whatever your interests or skills, we can use your help protecting birds and the environment. If you like working outdoors, writing, speaking, organizing, baking, or just meeting new people, we have opportunities for you. Call the Clearwater Audubon Society at 727-442-9140 or an officer listed on page 2 and we'll tell you how you can help.