



Wing Beat

February & March 2010
Vol. 44 No. 1

Reach us by calling 727-442-9140 or visit us at www.clearwateraudubon.org

Moccasin Lake Nature Park Gets a New Resident



Weeki is alert because he hears a Red shouldered hawk. The nature park enclosure is equipped with an owl box, perches and a water source. Photos: Barb Walker

On Saturday, January 23rd, an Eastern Screech Owl, familiarly called “Weeki”, moved in to one of the aviaries at Moccasin Lake Nature Park. Weeki has been glove trained and is an education bird. Weeki was taken from the wild in Palm Harbor. He had a habit of pretending to be injured when humans were close. This most likely led to an unnecessary rescue by a well meaning human.

When he was a baby and a human came near he would roll one eye back, droop an eyelid, drop one of his wings, and fall over on his side pretending to be dead. When observed through glass he got back up and perched perfectly with both eyes wide open. All efforts were made to prepare Weeki for release. And he was indeed released on a Saturday night. The surprise was that he broke back into the aviary and was waiting there the next morning.

Weeki is imprinted on humans and his survival chances aren't very good on his own. He will live in the aviary at Moccasin Lake Nature Park under the care of park staff and volunteers.



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KiteWatch Volunteers Needed

Anyone interested in monitoring activity centers of Swallow-tailed Kites please contact Barb Walker at 727-431-2856 or email barbibird@tampabay.rr.com. We will monitor the perimeter of Lake Tarpon and the perimeter of Brooker Creek Preserve including the Hillsborough side. Project starts February 10th.

Monday, February 1, 2010 Swallow-tailed Kites—Ken Meyer

Ken Meyer has directed research on birds in Florida and beyond for 21 years. He obtained his B.S. in Zoology from the University of Maine, Orono, in 1978 and his Ph.D. in Zoology from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, in 1987. After serving as a post-doctoral and then research associate in the University of Florida's Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation and as a research biologist with the National Park Service in Big Cypress National Preserve, Ken founded the nonprofit Avian Research and Conservation Institute (ARCI) to study rare (and particularly unlisted) species of birds to support management and conservation planning. This research, in the southeastern US and Latin America, has addressed questions about population ecology and demography, breeding biology, migration, over-wintering biology, and year-round habitat requirements. His study subjects have included Swallow-tailed Kites, Short-tailed Hawks, White-crowned Pigeons, Snail Kites, Wood Storks, Sharp-shinned Hawks, Jabiru Storks, Great White Herons, Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Yellow-headed Parrots, and King Vultures. These projects also have provided opportunities for training students, land managers, and other biologists here and abroad. Since 1998, Ken has served as an adjunct Associate Professor in the University of Florida's Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, where his activities include supervising his own graduate students, who have used some of ARCI's projects as the focus for M.S. and Ph.D. research; training and serving on the committees of other graduate students; and collaborating with colleagues on ecological studies of birds.

Kettle of Swallow-tailed Kites June 11, 2009 Photo: Barb Walker

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Clearwater Audubon Society *servicing all of North Pinellas since 1959*

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WING BEAT Editor - Barb Walker

Submissions deadline for the next issue

is March 10th, 2010. **Submissions must be un-formatted in Times New Roman.**

Please submit articles via email to: barbibird@tampabay.rr.com

or mail to the address above, Attn: Wingbeat Editor.

WING BEAT advertising deadline for the next issue

is March 10, 2010. Business size ads are \$25 per issue.

Please address other rate inquiries to

Treasurer, Jane Williams at 727-447-7394.

Please submit ads via email to: adsubmission@clearwateraudubon.org \

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Please email barbibird@tampabay.rr.com to initiate electronic e-delivery. CAS will not release your email address to any third party.

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North Pinellas Christmas Bird Count results

By Marianne Korosy

Clearwater Audubon sponsored the 34th annual North Pinellas count on December 27, 2009. This season marked the 110th annual National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count cosponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in more than 5000 locations in the western hemisphere. We had 83 volunteers participate this year on 10 teams covering separate areas within a 15-mile diameter circle centered at U.S. Hwy 19 and Tampa Road. A total of 32,901 individual birds of 161 species were recorded in the 24-hour count period.

Several teams were out before dawn and found Barred, Great Horned, and Eastern Screech-owls, Whip-poor-will, Wilson’s Snipe, Wood Duck, and American Woodcock. Although it was a blustery, cool day that turned windy, teams managed to find a few of the more unusual raptors including a Northern Harrier on Caladesi Island and two Peregrine Falcons sighted in east Clearwater.

Due to the onshore winds on count day a high count of 100 Northern Gannet were spotted offshore but the most unusual seabird sighting - a first for the north Pinellas count - was of 3 Parasitic Jaegers that flew past 5 birders on the north end of Honeymoon Island.

Teams found several species of ducks: Lesser Scaup, Redhead, Blue-winged Teal, Mottled, Mallard, Muscovy, Wood, Northern Pintail, Northern Shoveler, Hooded and Red-breasted Merganser but missed finding Green-winged Teal and American Wigeon. Three teams found all the expected freshwater rail species for our area: Sora, King, and Virginia and several teams heard Clapper Rail in coastal salt marshes. Ovenbirds, often reported by one or two teams, were sighted by five teams for a total of nine birds.

Species rarely or uncommonly recorded for the north Pinellas count included Great Black-backed Gull, White-winged Dove, House Finch, Northern Bobwhite, Eastern Meadowlark, Song Sparrow, Nelson’s Sparrow, Saltmarsh Sparrow, Northern Waterthrush, Northern Parula, Painted Bunting, and Golden-crowned Kinglet. Four teams reported Bonaparte’s Gull this year and three teams reported Wild Turkey.

Thanks to all 83 volunteers who came out on count day and a special thanks to the team leaders and co-team leaders – Paul Trunk, Mike MacDonald, Lynn Sumerson, Dana Kerstein, Dave Gagne, John Hood, Ken Rowe, Jon Burr, Merle Hubbard, Dorothy Fritzinger, Joan Brigham, Steven Fuller, and Dave Goodwin. I am certain all who attended will join me in extending warm appreciation to Paul and Debbie Trunk who hosted the bird species countdown and an excellent potluck dinner at the end of a long, rewarding day of birding.



Photo Credit: Irene Hernandez

Whooping Cranes

The Whooping Cranes arrived on January 19th. One of the flock, the most successful female of the group, was shot in Indiana during the trip. The crew faced brutal cold weather during their journey. For more information on the migration please visit www.operationmigration.com.



Photo Credits: Barb Walker



Leah, 8, and Lani 4, wait for the Whooping Cranes to flyover



Wood stork hit by car on State Road 54, January 19, 2010. Photo Barb Walker



Territory Competition of Pinellas Bald Eagles

By Barbara Walker

According to Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Annual Report for the nesting season 2008—2009 the estimated population of bald eagle nesting territories throughout Florida was 1,340 and the population of nesting bald eagles in Florida increased by 4.8% over the number of active territories reported in 2008. Pinellas also saw a steep increase last year in the number of nests. Eight new nesting territories were identified and reported. Bald Eagles are confined in Pinellas County due to space limitations. The northern portion of the county is more heavily populated than the southern portion of the county, although we've seen an increase in young pairs nesting in cell towers on the south end of Lake Seminole.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) assigns every bald eagle nest a nest id. In Pinellas they all start

with the letters P I. PI18 is a nest in Palm Harbor which has been established for quite a few years. The female eagle of the mating pair has been photographed in her territory several times within the last 18 months. The reason we know it is the same eagle is because she is banded. Attempts to collect the band numbers were unsuccessful last nesting season. Bald eagle nesting season starts October 1st and ends May 15th in Florida.



In late November of 2009 the PI18 female was in a fight with another female eagle and was badly injured. The nest is located in a sand pine, one of less than 10 others in sand pines in the entire state, and is on a residential property. The female eagle waited, bleeding, and feather bare, at the screen door. The homeowner's dog drew attention to the eagle. The homeowner, Mr. Fernandes, walked over to the screen door and opened it and the eagle hopped into the lanai. He then went to retrieve a telephone from inside the house. In the meantime the bald eagle fell into the pool and began to swim across. Mr. Fernandes returned and lifted the bald eagle out of the pool with the pole end of a pool net used as a perch. The bald eagle was picked up by Christina of the Suncoast Seabird Sanctuary.

The bald eagle's band number is 629-22511. She had been previously rescued, in 1996, also in Palm Harbor, also by the Suncoast Seabird Sanctuary. At that time she had been shot with a .22 caliber. She was transferred to the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey. Her feathers were so badly damaged that she remained there until 1998. In February of 1998 she was released about 6 miles northwest of Brooksville. She was an adult when she was initially rescued so she is at least 18 years old and some clinic staff suspect she is in her 20's. She is currently healing up well, although an area around her beak seems to be giving her the most trouble. Her mate attempted to incubate on his own and protect the nest for 6 days after she was removed from the territory. It took an extended period of time for the male to accept a new mate. Potentially the original pair could have been together for a very long time which is amazing, particularly in an urban landscape.

We are seeing heavy concentrations of bald eagles on the west side of Lake Tarpon this year which is where PI18 is located. Additional nest are still being located but few in live pines. Many new nests are being found in cell towers. Cell tower activity productivity data is still relatively new. One nest, reported by several EagleWatch volunteers, is in a cell tower at a park in Pinellas Park. The cell tower is unusual in that there are actually two nests on the tower. One of them is believed to be an osprey nest and the other is an active bald eagle nest. A ranger reports an Osprey was shot there 6 months ago.

Subsamples of bald eagle territories are surveyed by FWC on an annual basis. The surveys are conducted by a fixed-winged aircraft and are considered critical for the conservation of the recently delisted species. Nationwide a Mid-Winter Bald Eagle Survey is conducted in select states by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Populations of bald eagles seem to be on the increase throughout the country creating a demand on the volunteers who monitor bald eagles and the volunteers who treat the injured bald eagles.





Red Light, Green Light
By Barbara Walker

Visit www.DunedinOspreyCam.org

Photo Credits: Ed Tess

Osprey nesting season is in full swing. Many pairs have been spotted 2 weeks earlier than usual. Through a grant 5 pairs of nesting ospreys have received new homes. The most recent on January 22, 2010. A concerned citizen first reported the pair nesting on the light signal of the Indian Rocks Bridge in late December. The Department of Transportation was notified. The nest was removed on January 7th and bird spikes were placed on the traffic signal. The ospreys used the spikes to anchor their nest down and rebuilt quickly. On January 21st the nest was removed again and retained for use on a pole and platform. The Department of Transportation coordinated with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the City of Indian Rocks Beach and the Clearwater Audubon Society to install a pole and a platform which was built by Cub Scout Pack 455. On Friday, January 22nd the pole and platform were installed by Steve Townsend and crew from Powertown Line Construction. The pole and platform conformed to FWC Guidelines. The ospreys were on the platform immediately following installation. Osprey mortality near bridges is high .



Photo Credit: Steven Prevuznak

Above: Preparation for the pole installation begins with the auger, highly specialized equipment and knowledge are required to install poles. Prior to pole installation all underground utilities must be located.
Photo Credit: Ed Tess

Picture at left, from left to right, Joe Severson, FDOT, Katasha Cornwell, FDOT, Mayor Johnson of Indian Rocks Beach, Dean Sharmin, Public Works for Indian Rocks Beach, and Steve Townsend, Powertown Line Construction

Photo Credit: Barb Walker

A Rescue at Sea
By Barbara Walker

Barn Owls aren't very common in Pinellas County, however one was found dead in south St. Petersburg on January 7th, most likely a vehicle trauma. The same week another Barn Owl also died at the Suncoast Seabird Sanctuary. However, one Barn Owl, brought in during the same time period survived. Apparently this Barn Owl landed on a supply boat that was following a research vessel 180 miles out in the Gulf of Mexico. The crew attempted to feed the owl but the bird wouldn't eat. After 4 days they saw the owl was weakening so they cut their trip short and headed back to port to meet Greg Slutsky who supervises rescues for the Suncoast Seabird Sanctuary. It isn't clear how the owl got so far away from the coast.

Lorraine and Don Margeson of St. Petersburg Audubon, have been working with the county to install Barn Owl nesting boxes on public lands in an extended effort to repopulate Pinellas County with these delicate creatures. She has already coordinated the banding and release of other Barn Owls pairs. For a period of time Barn Owls were considered extirpated from Pinellas County which makes handling of every individual extremely important.



Photo Credit: Lorraine Margeson

Clearwater Audubon South of Lake Okeechobee

January 16th and 17th

By Jane Williams

There wasn't much hope for the weather on this weekend, but it turned out better than expected. The rain occurred Saturday night after dark. My only complaint was the lack of sunshine that did not allow the plumage colors to gleam as they do in full sunlight. But, one highlight of the trip was a view of a crested caracara in a cabbage palm glowing in the small ray of sunshine that peeked through. That was good.

First stop was Storm Treatment Area 5. This year the dykes were not as crowded as last year so that we were not jostling with other cars on the dyke-top sand and gravel road. Being raised gives a better view of the wetlands spread out below. And there were lots and of wading birds, gallinules, coot, and ducks.

Highlights were the:

- large (20 plus) flocks of white pelicans and the sight of some flying overhead.
- fulvous whistling ducks – a lifer for me with lovely plumage.
- Eurasian widgeon – a treat for the more sophisticated birder. I am not sure I can identify an American widgeon yet so I refrain from comment.
- A good-sized group of black necked stilts. In STA-5, it is the number of individual birds as well as the number of species that impresses me.
- Swallows – lots of tree and rough-winged. The lack of sun made the tree swallows a little dull.

Ducks – northern shovelers, ring-necked, blue-winged, ruddy, scaup

Next it was off to Government road. Birding here is like picking a pasture, piling out of the van, and watching. There were great treats at every stop

- Snail kites soaring – a beautiful raptor to add to the expected Osprey, red-tailed and red shouldered hawks. There were some short-tailed hawks as well – both light and dark morph.
- Lots of black and turkey vultures. Hard to imagine that there is enough road kill to feed all these carrion eaters.
- Bald Eagle – one van saw it and the other did not. I was in the van that did. Yippee!
- A Wilson's snipe that walked right past our van window...followed by a flooded pasture with snipe and killdeer wandering about in abundance.
- Common ground doves made their appearance.
- A brown-crested flycatcher which led to some lively speculation about the differences between a brown-crested and a great-crested. We settled on the brown-crested and saw a great-crested at Corkscrew Swamp. An Eastern meadowlark, on a fence post in full sun...just like it is supposed to be.

Next morning we were off to Corkscrew Swamp which was a disappointment to me after the number of birds seen at STA-5. Highlights were:

- A male painted bunting – just a glimpse but, finally, a life bird for me
- An ovenbird – another life bird for me

Warblers – black and white, palm, pine, yellow-throated, yellow-rumped as well as vireos – white-eyed, blue-headed. Common yellow throat and blue-grey gnatcatchers were present as well.

This was a nicely balanced weekend, with wetlands (STA-5), open fields (Government road plus a few side trips), and Corkscrew Swamp with its mixture of habitats. Accommodations at the historic Clewiston Inn plus their good southern cooking added a nice note of comfort.

February Field Trips

February 6, 8am

Moccasin Lake Nature Park

Madeleine Bohrer 518-6241

Meet in parking lot; songbirds & raptors in oak & xeric hammock, water birds in lake. ¼ mile shell & board trail.

February 6, 7am

Bartow Borrow Pits—VAN ONLY—FULL

Dana Kerstein 441-1609

Meet at Tri-City Mall in front of Party City; resident & migratory water birds in restored phosphate mines, + raptors & songbirds!

February 12-15

Northern Minnesota

Paul Trunk 447-4785 Northern owls, Crossbills, Bohemian Waxwings, & arctic species that winter only in northern states.

February 13, 7am

Robinson Preserve and Palma Sola Gardens

Mike MacDonald 409-0459

Meet at Tri-City Mall in front of Party City; raptors, song, water & shore birds, coastal & tidal mangrove habitats; 3+ miles boardwalks, sand & grass trails.

February 20, 7:30am

Cockroach Bay

Lynn Sumerson 596-8822

Meet at Tri-City Mall in front of Party City; water & shorebirds, raptors, songbirds, and ponds in one of Tampa Bay's productive estuaries.

February 27, 7am

Sarasota Celery Fields

Mike MacDonald 409-0459

Meet at Tri-City Mall in front of Party City; raptors, prairie & water birds in abandoned agricultural fields.

March Field Trips

March 6, 8am

Moccasin Lake Nature Park

John Hood 461-4762

Meet in parking lot; songbirds & raptors in oak & xeric hammock, water birds in lake. ¼ mile shell & board trail.

March 13, 8am

Honeymoon Island State Park

John Hood 461-4762

Meet behind McDonalds at corner of ALT US19 & Curlew Road; wading, water & shore birds plus migratory songbirds & raptors. 2-3 mile walk on sand trails.

March 15—22

Panama Birding—SOLD OUT

Paul Trunk 447-4785

March 20, 7:30am

Morris Bridge and Lettuce Lake

Merle Hubbard 939-1549

Meet at Tri-City Mall in front of Party City; migratory songbirds, raptors & water birds; boardwalks & sand trails, ¾ mile at Morris Bridge, 1-2 miles at Lettuce lake.

March 27, 8am

Fort Desoto County Park

Lynn Sumerson 596-8822

Meet at Ft DeSoto Ranger Station; migratory songbirds, raptors, water & shore birds; causeway & shoreline drive + 1-2 mile trail walk on Tampa Bay's north shore.

Clearwater Audubon Society Membership Application

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

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WHAT IS THE CLEARWATER AUDUBON SOCIETY?

Reach us by calling 727-442-9140 or visit us at www.clearwateraudubon.org

Our purpose is embodied in our motto: **Conservation though 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 www.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.

Our Motto: *Conservation Through Education*

Supporting our community since 1959