

DECEMBER 2019

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St. Lucie Audubon Society

Fostering appreciation of nature in St Lucie County, Florida, since 1954



The Laughing Gull

President's Message

By Ellen Lynch

1,2,3,4...counting every one. That's what we do around this time of the year. We are getting ready for our annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count.

On Saturday, December 14th, our hearty volunteer members go out to count the number of birds, individuals and species, they see that day. Why do we do this? Well, there is some history to this event that you might enjoy hearing about.

Prior to the turn of the 20th century, hunters engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side Hunt." They would choose sides and go afield with their guns and whoever brought in the biggest pile of feathered (and furred) specimens won. How awful in today's standards!

Thank goodness that has changed! Beginning on Christmas Day in 1900, ornithologist Frank M. Chapman proposed a new holiday tradition, a "Christmas Bird Census" that would count birds during the holiday rather than killing them. Each year at this time, birders throughout the world interested in participating in the CBC start signing up and planning the Census.

Our chapter is led by Ed Bowes who is now organizing the teams to cover our area on December 14th. We can always use volunteers to cover our local area effectively. We also enjoy a pizza party at the end of the day to share our results and socialize. You can be a part of this wonderful citizen science project by contacting Ed Bowes via email at: slacbc2010@gmail.com

Who will find the most birds? The most species? The most unusual?

Inside This Issue

President's Message	1
Field Trip and Speaker	2
Conservation Corner	3
Chapter Dues Schedule	3
Items to Note	4
Officers & Board Members	4
Feathered Friends	5



Photo by Dan Martinelli

Thursday, Dec. 5:
Speaker: Sam Fried

The speaker for our December general meeting will be Sam Fried whose topic will be “Birding in Brazil’s Pantanal and Iguassu Falls.”

Wednesday, December 4, 2019 Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge

Where: Pelican Island NWR Welcome Center, Vero Beach, FL

When: 8:00 am to 12 noon

Guide: Roger LaLiberte & Kathy Mayshar

Details: This is a walking tour on boardwalks and a driving tour on dirt roads.

We recommend long pants, close-toed shoes, hat, insect repellent, sunscreen, and water. Adults (ages 12+) only.

Bring your binoculars, camera, and scopes to enjoy the birds.

Contact: Kathy Mayshar at cell: 772-359-9108 email: cmectvtfl@gmail.com. You can register on our website: <https://www.stlucieaudubon.org/field-trips>



**“Nature is not a place to visit. It is home.”
~Gary Snyder**



Conservation Corner

BY RUTH NEESE

What you see in the photo is illegal in Florida. Did you know that? Intentionally feeding Sandhill Cranes is forbidden and has been illegal since 2002.

Florida Administrative 68A-4.001 forbids the intentional feeding of several wildlife species. Some of these species are obvious—bears, coyotes, and foxes seem to fit on a list like this. Other species may not be so obvious—racoons, Sandhill Cranes, and pelicans. Feeding pelicans has been illegal since 2008.

For Sandhill Cranes, intentionally providing food can decrease their natural fear of humans and lead to aggressive behavior. Close proximity to humans can result in injury to these birds, especially if they are getting too close to cars. Humans may be providing poor quality food, such as bread or corn.

For pelicans, feeding these birds changes natural behavior. Learning to beg at fish cleaning stations can be detrimental to the birds' health. Fish skeletons tear pelicans' pouches and get caught in their crops, puncturing their throats. Many birds die from these injuries.

So if you are new to Florida, please remember—**do not feed the big birds!**



Chapter Dues

The year for local chapter dues runs January to January. Dues can be paid by check or via PayPal on our Web site: <http://stlucieaudubon.org>

- Individual: \$25
- Family (2 or more people): \$30
- Sponsor: \$50
- Patron: \$100

The Laughing Gull

Photo by Ed Bowes

Citizen Science

BY ED BOWES

Citizen science applies to more than birds; hard to believe, I know. Monitoring the health of the Indian River Lagoon is important to this region for many reasons. The scientists at the Ocean Research & Conservation Association (ORCA) offer several citizen science project related to monitoring the Indian River Lagoon. These projects include:

- Growing oysters off your dock to monitor the health of that sentinel species;
- Participating in living shoreline restoration;
- Collecting water samples for pollution mapping; and
- Collecting fish to monitor for cyanotoxins from blue-green algae.

If you live near the water, or simply want to help support the survival of the Indian River Lagoon ecosystem, consider volunteering some time with ORCA. For more information and to register for volunteer opportunities, visit their website <https://www.teamorca.org/citizen-science.html>.

Project Feederwatch starts Saturday, November 9 and runs through April 3, 2020. Join the team of citizen scientists by counting birds who visit your yard and feeders! The Cornell Lab of Ornithology uses the data to identify changes in winter ranges and bird species at risk. You can join Project Feederwatch here: <https://feederwatch.org/about/how-to-participate/>

Visit our website now to register for our annual Adams Ranch Breakfast and Tour! There are three dates this year, and space is limited:

- January 18, 2020
- February 15, 2020
- March 14, 2020

The cost is \$30 per person, which includes a full hot breakfast and a tour of the stunning Adams Ranch.

Reserve your spot now at <https://www.stlucieaudubon.org/adams-ranch-tour>

St. Lucie Audubon Officers & Board Members

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Raffle Coordinator – Wayne Pembroke

Board members may be contacted by email at stlucieaudubon@gmail.com

Feathered Friends

BY RUTH NEESE

One local member of the blackbird family is the Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*). These blackbirds are larger than a Red-winged Blackbird, but smaller than a Boat-tailed Grackle. Like Boat-tailed Grackles, Common Grackles are found in larger numbers closer to human habitation in St. Lucie County. Common Grackles are primarily seedeaters, but will consume almost anything, including insects, small reptiles, nestling birds, and human garbage. They are significant agricultural pests in cornfields, and may be seen in large flocks in agricultural areas.

Common Grackles have long black legs, a long tail, and a thick black beak. From a distance, they appear black in color. Up close, they are very iridescent, with a glossy purple head and a bronzy body. One very helpful ID clue is their bright yellow eye; other local blackbirds only have black eyes.

Look for Common Grackles almost anywhere in the eastern portion of the county—parking lots, suburban backyards, dumpsters, etc. They can also be seen in Bluefield Ranch Preserve, Pinelands Preserve, Sheraton Scrub Preserve, and at the Oxbow Eco-center.



Coming Attractions

FIELD TRIP

Saturday, January 25, 2020

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge

GENERAL MEETING

Thursday, January 2, 2020

TBA

We're on the Web!

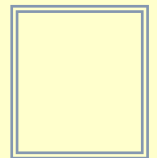
Visit us at:

<http://stluciesudubon.org>

St. Lucie Audubon Society

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