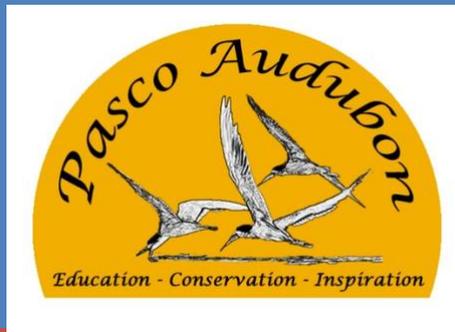


# Pasco Audubon



January 2024



## Upcoming Events

- January 6  
8am** Bird Walk in Starkey Park.  
Meet at 8am in the Education Center parking lot
- January 6  
11am** Bugs in your Bloomers – John Lampkin  
More to your right, meeting starts at 11am in the Starkey Education Center
- January 20** Field Trip to Circle B Bar Preserve - see details on page 2.
- January 21  
8am** Birding by Bike in Starkey Park – see details on p.2.
- January 27** Field Trip to Cross Bar Ranch – see details on p.3

## January 6<sup>th</sup> – John Lampkin Bugs in Your Bloomers

John Lampkin explores the way in which insects and flowering plants have been co-evolving for at least 135 million years to their mutual benefit, becoming our most abundant flora and fauna. The relationships are more varied, complex, and sophisticated than first meets the eye. So, what is that bug and what is it doing in that flower? Armed with camera and thinking cap, John Lampkin has been investigating such questions and will share some amazing insights he has documented in this beautiful, educational, and entertaining photographic presentation.

John Lampkin is an avid naturalist and macro-photographer with credits in many field guides, books, journals, websites and blogs, and he won the 2020 "American Butterflies" magazine photo contest. As a professional composer, his woodwind quintet, "Insects: A Musical Entomology in Six Legs" won the Grand Prize in a Composers Guild international competition.

Meet at the Starkey Environmental Education Center at 11am.  
Free, and light refreshments provided.





Left to right: Painted Bunting, Purple Gallinule and Alligator on last year's trip by Christine Rowland

## January 20<sup>th</sup>: Field Trip to Circle B Bar Reserve

One of our perennial favorite field trips is Circle B Bar Reserve in Polk County. We find a wide range of birds here, supplemented by other species such as raccoons and alligators. We usually break into two groups, depending on the length of walk you'd like to undertake. The shorter walk is a little over 3 miles, and the longer walk typically more like 5 miles, so do allow the full morning for this activity. While we plan to head out on the trail at 8am, we do advise arriving early as there are often wonderful birds to see in the area around the trail head and welcome center.

The walk takes us across marsh and along the shore of Lake Hancock. The close-up opportunities with wildlife make this a great opportunity for photographers as well as birders. Just checking my eBird report from last year's field trip showed me that our 'short walk' group walked 3.3 miles over 4 hours (which probably included time at the trail head and picnic area) and saw 57 species of birds, and we had quite a surprise when a huge alligator hauled itself out of one pond and across our path in front of us to the other side!

There are portable restrooms at the trailhead, as the welcome center with regular facilities doesn't open till later in the morning. Please bring water, and it's a great idea to bring snacks or a picnic to enjoy on the shaded picnic tables at the end of the walk. No food is sold on the premises, so recommend bringing all you'll need with you. Please do not leave valuables in your car in this location.

The walk will commence at 8am on Saturday, January 20<sup>th</sup>. The address of the reserve is 4399 Winter Lake Rd, Lakeland, FL 33803. Please reach out to me at [president@pascoaudubon.com](mailto:president@pascoaudubon.com) if you have any additional questions. While registration is not necessary and all are welcome to this free event, we do recommend letting us know that you plan to attend so that we can keep you updated.

## Birding by Bike: Starkey Park on Sunday, January 21st

Do you enjoy a bit more physical activity with your birding? If so, you might really enjoy the Birding by Bike experience. Join **Bob Burkard** in the **Environmental Education parking lot at 8am**. You'll be riding on the multi-use trail through the park, giving you a great opportunity to see and hear some of the birds that we don't see so often up front, such as Northern Bobwhite, Brown-headed Nuthatch and Bachman's Sparrow. This event is free and open to all. To register and if you have additional questions, Bob's email is [robertburkard9@gmail.com](mailto:robertburkard9@gmail.com).



Florida Scrub Jay and Burrowing Owls by Noriko Buckles

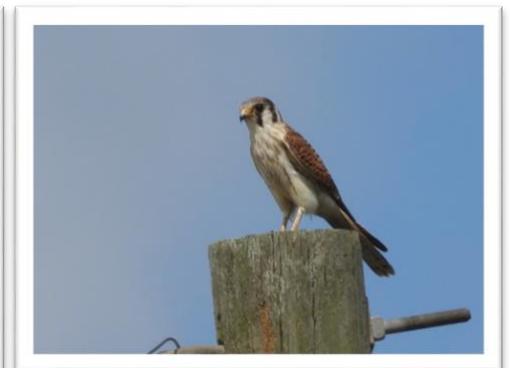
## January 27<sup>th</sup>: Field Trip to Cross Bar Ranch

Cross Bar Ranch is a private property in central Pasco. It is another of our most popular trips, probably because it is possibly the only place in Pasco to find Burrowing Owls and Florida Scrub Jays. That said, this vast ranch includes many different habitats from oak hammock and pine flatwoods to open ranchland and scrub. Unlike our trip to Circle B Bar the previous weekend, we will be using our cars to get us to the various areas of the ranch, where our trips regularly cover about 17 miles in the course of the morning. You should note that high-clearance vehicles with all-wheel or 4-wheel drive are recommended as tracks on the ranch are deeply rutted in some areas and can be very muddy if there has been recent rain.

We are limited to 10 vehicles on this trip, and pre-registration is essential. This property has been carefully managed to give these two vulnerable species an opportunity to thrive. Last year, Quest Ecology banded 50 Burrowing Owl fledges on the property – a remarkable achievement considering how uncommon they are to see these days in Pasco. Typically we stop at one particular field with several burrows and a pair of owls that allow us to see this species. We'll stay at a respectful distance, but we should all be able to get good views, especially with binoculars and scopes.

The Scrub Jays can be harder to find, but we'll do our best. Some years their territory has at times been surrounded by water and we've been unable to reach it, although that seems unlikely to be the case this time around. I'm hoping we'll find the one family group at this location.

In addition to the owls and jays, we should see a wide range of birds in the morning, and we'll also be trying in a couple of spots for wintering sparrows. We anticipate a trip of 4-5 hours over 17 miles, with about a mile of walking. The ranch is located at Locket Ave, Spring Hill, FL 34610, and we'll begin our trip at 7:30am. Pre-registration is essential – please let me know at [president@pascoaudubon.com](mailto:president@pascoaudubon.com) if you would like to attend.



Loggerhead Shrike, Eastern Meadowlark and American Kestrel by Christine Rowland

## Report: 35<sup>th</sup> Annual West Pasco Christmas Bird Count

### By Pamela Graber



Left: The Kell Roost  
(photo by Mike Kell)

Right: Charlie Fisher with  
what was left of his sandals  
after his adventure on Sand  
Bay (photo from Charlie  
Fisher)



On December 14, 2023 the Pasco Audubon Christmas Bird Count consisted of 48 participants who recorded a total of 154 species within the count circle of 15 miles diameter. The count circle center is located at the former Magnolia Valley golf course but we meet at noon at the Heartwood Preserve for pizza and a sharing of lists and made plans in the afternoon to recheck our assigned areas for missing species. We are so grateful to Laura Starkey and the Heartwood staff for making us so welcome after a long morning's birding!

The weather was very windy this year, with gusts past 20 mph with small craft warnings out so that all the boat trips planned had to be cancelled. Also an extremely low tide hampered the early morning birders search for loons or ducks as they were at an extreme distance.

However, for Charlie Fisher the low tide gave good access for wading out into Sand Bay. Charlie writes that, "The trick on Sand Bay is that the mudflat only opens up for the hour and a half before and after low tide- and it is necessary to go out there, as it is the only sandy spot that holds sandpipers and similar shoreline loving birds in the count circle. The sand is very fine and silty, so that you sink into it quickly. The birds are spread over a very wide area and are not close by, so walking is essential to get a look at them even with a spotting scope. Then when you try to walk, there is a lot of suction from the sand on your feet as they inexorably sink down into the wet mushy silt... And in this case, it ripped up my sandals and I walked back barefoot!" He was rewarded with 34 species – several of which were seen by no other birders on the day.

The high wind seemed to keep the inland small birds like sparrows and buntings, for example, in hiding. Thus some excellent possible species like White-crowned Sparrow and Painted Bunting and even Seaside Sparrow were not seen on the day (although seen in the last weeks prior).

Joe Colantonio had done some arduous scouting in the Black Rail trail area prior to the big day that involved waders and high water in the reed marshes of Werner-Boyce. Mike Ranck and Patricia Goldberg joined him as well in the search that only turned up the Seaside Sparrows and usual rails but not the elusive Black Rail. Again, evidence of the challenge of doing a proper count.

One of the fun features of count week is performing a roost count the night prior to count day. Mike and Laurie Kell have gathered like-minded friends to conduct one behind their home for more than 15





Left: Long-billed Dowitchers at Cool Springs seen by Rowland/Burkard

Right: Northern Pintail seen by the Day/Hubbard team

Photos by Christine Rowland



years. This year was a particularly rewarding count with 1300 birds of 10 different species noted. Mike's photo shows the effect of so many white birds — ibis and egrets in the trees, almost like snow.

Nighttime and near dawn birding is also an important part of count day that is challenging as we listen for owls or woodcock or whippoorwill in the dark or near dawn— not always successfully. I spent 2 hours at Werner Boyce in the dark from 4:30 -6:30 and heard not a peep. I had a headlamp and my phone to light the way so it was not too scary.

Doug Bond heard American Woodcock and Northern Bobwhite in the earliest hours of his day hiking in Jay B. Starkey Wilderness Park and later sighted a rare Pine Siskin. Deeper into the park Don Fraser and team noted families of Brown-headed Nuthatches – evidence of regular prescribed burning. Nearby, Lillian Saul and Doug Wassmer heard the secretive and little-known Bachman's Sparrow calling just after dawn in the Anclote Tract of Starkey Wilderness Preserve. Also in Starkey Wilderness Preserve, Serenova Tract, Lorraine Margeson and Ann Ruben saw the only Indigo Bunting located on count day. Lorraine has birded Serenova on the count for the past 16 Years!

Christine Rowland and Bob Burkard heard King Rail calling on the marsh behind the Industrial Park near dawn and saw a great variety of species when the light was just dawning at Cool Springs including over 200 Sandhill Cranes, plus Long-billed Dowitchers, yellowlegs and teal. The American Avocet seen in the prior days was unfortunately not present on count day. My team (Bill Kaempfer, Cuneyt Yilmaz and Debbie Grimes) waded into the shallows near the reed grass marsh at Werner Boyce to hear multiple families of Clapper Rails calling as well as a loud Virginia Rail just before dawn.

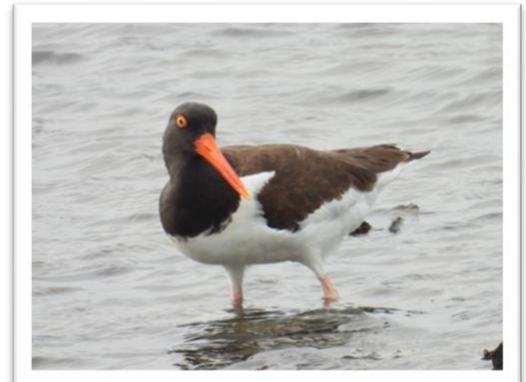
Long time Pasco count birders overall demonstrated their knowledge of our habitat with great finds. Peter Day (with Jo and Merl Hubbard, Alice Jewell and Catherine Day), who has previously led the organization of these CBC counts and has participated for many years here in Pasco, had great success finding two duck species not otherwise located on the count -- a Northern Pintail at Jasmine Road pond and a Northern Shoveler at a water treatment plant.

Also on the duck front, John Paalvast, with his son Victor and an assist from local resident JoAnn Sinatra, located American Wigeon and Redhead in Timber Oaks.

Mike Ranck, with Ken Landry and Kimberly Snaric found our only American Oystercatcher of the day, and also managed to get a photo of a dark morph Short-tailed Hawk – always a great bird to find on the count.



The Short-tailed Hawk and American Oystercatcher seen by Mike Ranck's team. Photos by Kimberly Snaric.





Left: Wilson's Snipe seen at Cool Springs

Right: Bufflehead seen at Cool Springs



Joanne Chamberlain, with her eagle-eyed husband, used her good warbler knowledge in the very developed Starkey Ranch area to locate orange-crowned warbler and Marsh Wrens.

Dave Bowman, another long-time participant and avid Pasco birder located our only Eastern Screech Owls of the day, and a Song Sparrow at Lake Dan. And John McCallister showed patience in staying at Key Vista for hours waiting for fleeting visits by Whimbrel, Short-billed Dowitcher and Black-bellied Plover.

Some of our younger birders — Olivia Malice and Stefanie Herrera with count leader Bonnie Morgan started their day at the Boy Scout Preserve watching the American Robins rise from the mangroves, and listening for Clapper and Sora Rails. While Green Key beach was tough, with the ultra low tide making things challenging, they searched hard and located a White-winged Dove – the only area in our circle that regularly hosts the species.

Mary Keith, along with Mic McCarty and Cecelia Dumois birded Heartwood early, finding an array of birds including Brown-headed Nuthatches and Brown Thrasher, but were particularly engaged by a leucistic Fish Crow found while traveling between points (see photo).

We did our best to cover a number of communities within the circle also – with Tom Crites (nice pick up on the Black-crowned Night Heron) and Susan Greenstein at Longleaf, Frank and Mary Ellen Gotto at Heritage Springs and Ann and David King at Seven Springs.

After lunch, the combined efforts of several birders found Ruddy Turnstones, that had been surprisingly elusive in the morning, while Bob and Denise Lane picked up a Northern Flicker just off Lake Blanche Drive – the first found in our count circle over several CBCs. Christine picked up Gadwall in an unsuccessful bid to relocate the Ruddy Duck at Timber Oaks, and Bill Pranty, our compiler, added the final species to this year's count – a Lesser Black-backed Gull, found well into the afternoon at Hudson Beach.

To me it feels like great fun and great challenge to be part of a group of such talented birders seeking out all the local species possible in one day no matter the weather. I have learned so much about where species are likely and whether they will be difficult or easy to locate. As we add our data to the bird database we are contributing to the worldwide data about the distribution of species over the years, and had a lot of fun while doing so!



Left: Lesser Black-backed Gull by Bill Pranty

Right: Leucistic Fish Crow, photo by Mic McCarty



## Costa Rica: An Introduction to Neotropical Birding February 16-23, 2025



Broad-billed Motmot, Resplendent Quetzal and Emerald Toucanet – courtesy of Holbrook Travel

Costa Rica is a tiny country, only about the size of West Virginia, but it packs incredible diversity into its borders. While any day traveling in Costa Rica can provide the highlight of a lifetime, it is the highs and lows that bestow the diversity of habitats that make Costa Rica home to so many incredible creatures, from sloths to quetzals. The highs are the soaring mountains that provide cloud forests filled with colorful birds and trees dripping with mosses cooled by blowing mists. The lows are lowland rainforest, some of the richest habitat in the world. This trip will sample both these habitats. Caribbean lowland forest, based at a lodge that hosts more than 460 species of birds, to the highs of the Talamanca Mountains, which shelters the beautiful Savegre Valley, the best place in the world to see the stunning Resplendent Quetzal and many other avian gems.

Take guided hikes in the private, 500-acre rainforest reserve at Selva Verde Lodge, which provides habitat to more than 350 bird species, including the endangered Great Green Macaw.

Ascend the 328-foot suspended walkway at Tirimbina Biological Reserve for the chance to see species that spend their time high within the forest canopy layer.

Visit Nectar & Pollen Reserve, a private reserve adjacent to Braulio Carrillo National Park, where some interesting possibilities include the Snowcap, Long-tailed Tyrant, Cinnamon Woodpecker, and White Hawk.

Search for the Resplendent Quetzal, Slaty Flowerpiercer, Ruddy Treerunner, and other high-elevation species in the cloud forests of the Talamanca Mountains.

This trip is exclusively for Pasco Audubon, and will be organized and run by Holbrook Travel. Trip cost for 8 days and 7 nights includes all hotels/eco-lodges, food, non-alcoholic beverages with meals, transfers and transportation within the country and local professional guides. It does not include airfare to Costa Rica, alcohol or tips. We are limited to 12 participants + leader. In this instance the cost will be \$2250. If there are 10-11 participants it will be \$2350. The single supplement is \$375. Registration for this trip will open on February 1<sup>st</sup> and will be handled by Holbrook Travel, and I will send the link for registration on that day to those who have specifically requested to be kept informed. Please ask to have your name added at [president@pascoaudubon.com](mailto:president@pascoaudubon.com).

Rufous-tailed Jacamar, rainforest waterfall and Great Green Macaw, courtesy of Holbrook Travel



## Looking further ahead...

Saturday, February 3<sup>rd</sup> **Walk in Jay B. Starkey Wilderness Park (8am)**  
Shorebird Identification with **Vince Capp (11am)**

Saturday, February 10<sup>th</sup> **Field Trip to Lake Dan Preserve** led by **Lilian Saul**

Sunday, February 11<sup>th</sup> **Birding by Bike on the Pinellas Trail** with **Bob Burkard**

February 16-19 **The Great Backyard Bird Count**

Saturday and Sunday  
February 24<sup>th</sup> -25<sup>th</sup> **An overnight field trip to Payne's Prairie and Sweetwater (Gainesville)**  
This is a new trip for us – there are usually exciting birds such as Whooping Crane in Payne's Prairie that we do not see in Pasco. Will have lodging info available soon. Contact [president@pascoaudubon.com](mailto:president@pascoaudubon.com) with questions.

## Pasco Audubon (Formerly West Pasco Audubon)

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\* Executive Officers are elected by the Board of Directors at our January meeting each year.