



March 2025 Newsletter

PASCO AUDUBON

Formerly known as West Pasco Audubon

Upcoming Events

Saturday, March 1st

Bird walk in Jay B. Starkey Wilderness Park. Meet at 8am in the Education Center parking lot. p.1

What's to Sea in the Gulf?

11am in the Starkey Education Center p.1

March 2nd - 8th

Introduction to Neotropical Birding - Costa Rica

Saturday, March 8th

8am Birding by Bike in Jay B. Starkey Wilderness Park p. 2

Saturday, March 15th

8am Field Trip to The Celery Fields, Sarasota p. 2

Saturday, March 29th

Field trip to Ocala National Forest (Scrub Jays) p. 3

What's to Sea in the Gulf? with John Groskopf



Cory's Shearwater by Pat Goldberg

At some point in every season we aim to include a presentation that comes under the heading of birding education. This year, this will be that talk. John Groskopf is the eBird reviewer for Pasco County (and others in the region), and he has a very special interest in pelagic birds. For the uninitiated, pelagic birds are those that are found well out to sea, and are not normally seen from land.

John will be going over the species we can expect to see off our coast in the Gulf and his experiences in finding them. He is also hoping to set up a trip for us in the future. This should be a very interesting experience to learn more about some different birds and a different type of birding that you could actually experience right here in our own area. We hope that you'll come and learn more about it. The photo used above is of a Cory's Shearwater that was taken on one of these trips by our own Pat Goldberg.

The meeting will be held on March 1st at 11am in the Starkey Environmental Education Center and will be free and open to all. Light refreshments will be available. And if you'd also like to take in a walk in the park, meet us in the parking lot at 8am and we'll see what we can find together. Hope to see you for both!

March 8th Birding by Bike – Jay B. Starkey Wilderness Park with Bob Burkard

Our March Pasco Audubon Birding by Bike outing will be at Starkey Wilderness Park. This is a great location for our outing with opportunities to see Brown-headed Nuthatches, Bald Eagles, Swamp Sparrows, and numerous other species. I enjoy seeing the many bluebirds throughout the park and I wonder how many of the ones that we observe and photograph were fledged in our Pasco Audubon nesting bird boxes.

We will meet at the parking lot by the Education Center at 8:00 AM and travel back through the park. I am looking forward to seeing the return of our summer birds.



Eastern Bluebird by Bob Burkard



Eastern Towhee by Bob Burkard

March 15th: Field Trip to The Celery Fields

Celery Fields is a beautiful Audubon property located near Sarasota that is well worth the drive. Audubon bird naturalists are stationed in gazebos over the wetland to help you identify the birds you are seeing. They'll help you to find whatever happens to be out there today - informed and helpful. If you'd like to get a sense of what you might see, our list from last year's visit is at <https://ebird.org/checklist/SI65716311> with lots of photos to give you a taste of what you might experience. Last year our list of 59 species included a Sora, Black-necked Stilts, Gray-headed Swamphen, Northern Harrier and Yellow-headed Blackbird.

The address for The Celery Fields is 6799 Palmer Blvd, Sarasota, FL 34240, and there are restrooms available at the parking lot here. We will meet here at 8am. If you arrive early, do check the gazebo with a feeder station behind the welcome center and there are Purple Martin houses on either side of the parking lot that will give you excellent views of these birds. Once we have gathered together, we'll walk across to the wetlands together. Please confirm your plan to attend this event with me (president@pascoaudubon.com). I will send you a trail map of the property and will be able to reach you in case of any adjustments to the schedule etc.

March 29: Field Trip to Ocala National Forest with Mike Ranck

Join us on Saturday, March 29 when Mike Ranck will lead us on a trip to Ocala National Forest. Why so far? This is arguably the very best place to see Florida Scrub-Jays, and Mike knows where they hang out - and as the forest covers an enormous area, that's a very good thing. Mike would like to meet us in the parking lot of the McDonald's in Ocala (3595 W Silver Springs Blvd, Ocala, FL 34475) 08:00 am. It's just off the exit from the I75. From there we will travel in convoy to the National Forest near Salt Springs.

Our early focus will be Scrub Jays. The area has several families with both banded and unbanded birds. And we will be in the breeding season, so this should make our visit all the more interesting. Then, for those who choose to, we will go about few miles further into the park to look for Red-cockaded Woodpeckers and Bachman's Sparrows. We haven't offered this trip for a couple of years due to scheduling challenges, so we do hope you'll be able to join us.



Florida Scrub-Jay by Christine Rowland

Kestrel Nest Sites in the Pasco County area by Karl E. Miller, Ph. D.

The Southeastern American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius paulus*) is a resident subspecies that is listed as Threatened by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). It breeds in drier upland habitats throughout peninsular Florida, and increasingly in urban and suburban areas. We recently documented [kestrels nesting in close contact with Monk Parakeets](#) in the Port Richey area. I am interested in locating more kestrel nests in urban areas in the Tampa Bay region as part of a larger research effort to understand the viability and productivity of urban nest sites. I am especially interested in southern Hernando, Pasco, and northern Hillsborough counties. If you find confirmed nest sites, please let me know at karl.miller.bird@gmail.com and provide location coordinates. Thank you!



Male Kestrel in Flight from FWC

Report: South Florida Weekend, January 24-26 by Christine Rowland



White-tailed Kite by Pat Goldberg



Blue-and-yellow Macaws by Pat Goldberg

This was an ambitious weekend, beginning with an evening birding on January 24th, a full day of birding Miami for exotics and the Yellow-headed Caracara on the 25th, and finally a full morning on a canal near the Everglades on Sunday morning. We were so fortunate to have Klenisson Brenner as our guide for the weekend (many of you will remember him from when he lived here in Pasco) as he was able to guide us quickly and easily from one spot to another. While only 4 of us from Pasco made the trip down, those of us who made it were very well rewarded!

Friday Evening

We met on a canal known only as CIII, located about 5 minutes outside the entrance to the Everglades. We were hoping for 3 species in particular, the White-tailed Kite, the Lesser Nighthawk, and the Barn Owl. The weather was uncharacteristically cool and breezy. We had lots of views of the White-tailed Kite as we walked along the canal, both perched on a wire that ran parallel to the canal, and on the wing foraging for insects. What a stunning bird! With fading light, it represented a photographic challenge, but see Pat Goldberg’s photo of it in flight above. We walked back to our cars along the canal and the sun dropped lower on the horizon and there was little light left. Suddenly a Lesser Nighthawk swooped down over us and down the canal to the north. It was our one and only look at this small nighthawk - but success was sweet. The Barn Owl eluded us, and we left to gather our energies for Saturday.



Spot-breasted Oriole by Klenisson Brenner



Painted Bunting by Klenisson Brenner



Yellow-headed Caracara by Christine Rowland



Blue-and-yellow Macaws by Klenisson Brenner

(South Florida Trip continued from previous page)

Saturday

There is not enough space in this newsletter for all of the details of this wonderful day, but Klenisson took us from one location to another, showing us Mitred Parakeets, Orange-winged Amazon, Spot-breasted Orioles, Red-masked Parakeets, Yellow-chevrons Parakeets, and White-eyed Parakeets. One of the most special moments of the day was finding 13 Blue-and-yellow Macaws in the parking lot of an active park. They were loud and gregarious, proving wonderful photographic subjects. We spent quite a bit of time with them as they were so incredibly cooperative. And there was a family of Egyptian Geese nearby too.

The other major highlight of the day came late in the afternoon. There has been a Yellow-headed Caracara, a Central and South American raptor that has been seen in the Miami area for almost a year. It can prove very hard to find, and many birders have taken several trips south in hopes of locating it. Klenisson had done his homework carefully, and knew that our best chance would be in the late afternoon in Oleta Park, although success was by no means guaranteed. As we were walking from our parked cars to the area it was most often seen, Pat looked up to her right and saw it perched on a snag in the mangroves. We'd only been there a few minutes! The bird posed for us for a couple of minutes before taking off. Wow! We all got good looks.

We rounded out the day with dinner at a nearby Italian restaurant, where Klenisson's wife Debra was able to join us. Delicious.
(continued on next page)



Cassin's Kingbird by Anthony Marella



Green Iguana by Christine Rowland



Scissor-tailed Flycatcher by Pat Goldberg



Cave Swallow by Anthony Marella

(continued from previous page)

Sunday

This day we walked another canal, L31W, near the Everglades. We took a long and leisurely walk north along the canal, seeing Scissor-tailed Flycatchers, Yellow Warblers, American Redstarts and Painted Buntings along the way. But we finally got to the spot we had been hoping for, and the Cassin’s Kingbird was waiting for us! We were also able to see a lovely Tropical Kingbird, that gave us wonderful photographic opportunities, and a Western Kingbird too. There were lots of swallows along the way - mostly Tree Swallows, but Klenisson located a Cave Swallow among them, and Anthony was able to grab a photo! After this we walked back, and just as we were arriving back near the cars, we came across a female Vermilion Flycatcher and another flycatcher, that turned out to be a Great Crested Flycatcher. What a morning. After saying our goodbyes and driving away there was one more treat in store - a pair of juvenile Swainson’s Hawks were perched on the wire along the road. We all passed them, but I had Anthony pull over so I could grab a shot or two.

Overall it was a wonderful weekend. We all got lifers (10 for yours truly) and had a great time doing it. While Klenisson works full time and has a very full life, he did say that he’d try to help anyone from our chapter who is traveling to the Miami area, and would try to join them for a morning if scheduling permits. His email is klebrenner@gmail.com.



On L31W by Anthony Marella



Tropical Kingbird by Christine Rowland



Hermit Thrush by Christine Rowland



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker by Christine Rowland

Report: Field Trip to Weekiwachee Preserve – February 8th by Don Fraser

On February 8th Pasco Audubon made its first visit to Weekiwachee Preserve, a large natural area near Spring Hill in Hernando County. Led by Don Fraser, 12 of us took a leisurely two mile hike through a mix of coastal hardwood hammock, pine-covered sandhill, grassy meadow and open pond habitats. The preserve was shrouded in dense fog when we set off, but conditions quickly cleared, and as the sun came out, so did the birds. Walking through the woodland trails we were treated to close-up views of some of our typical winter residents. These included Carolina Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, a Blue-headed Vireo, Carolina and Northern House wrens, and several warbler species, among them Pine, Yellow-rumped, Black-and-white, Orange-crowned and Yellow-throated. Highlights were three Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and a very co-operative Hermit Thrush who posed for photos in response to a recording of its distinctive “chup” call. As we approached the open ponds (formed from past phosphate mining) we walked slowly through the surrounding grassy fields in search of sparrows. We flushed many Savannahs, and a couple of us were fortunate to photograph a Song Sparrow, an uncommon to rare winter visitor in Hernando. In all, we tallied over 40 species, a total that would have been higher if we had spent more time surveying the ponds for waterbirds. For most of the participants this was their first visit to Weekiwachee Preserve and they all came away with a strong desire to return. There is much to explore here.



Don at Weekiwachee by Doreen Damm



Savannah Sparrow by Christine Rowland



**Above photo taken by photographer Ron Buening II. It took "Best of Show" in 2024.*

Photography Competition

Nature and Wildlife of Tampa Bay
2025 Photography Competition



- Calling all nature photographers! Join **Pasco Audubon's Photography Competition** and share your best wildlife and nature shots from around Tampa Bay. The competition is open to all photographers. **Entries and registration are due by March 12th.**

On April 5th @ 11am we will host an **awards ceremony** to announce the winners, award cash prizes, and celebrate everyone's photos at the **Starkey Park Environmental Education Center**. Our featured presentation will be on **Costa Rica: A Photographic and Birding Adventure** and will be presented by our members/photographers who are traveling to Costa Rica this spring.

Thank you to our sponsors!



Register Today and help our community celebrate nature and support conservation efforts!

Competition entry fees support Pasco Audubon conservation initiatives!

Visit www.pascoaudubon.com for instructions on how to enter the competition and for event details.

Questions? Email Us At PascoAudubonPhotos@gmail.com

Want to learn more about birding and enjoy nature with others? Join Pasco Audubon! Visit us online: www.pascoaudubon.com View our schedule of events and activities.

Pasco Audubon Bluebird Project by Bob Burkard

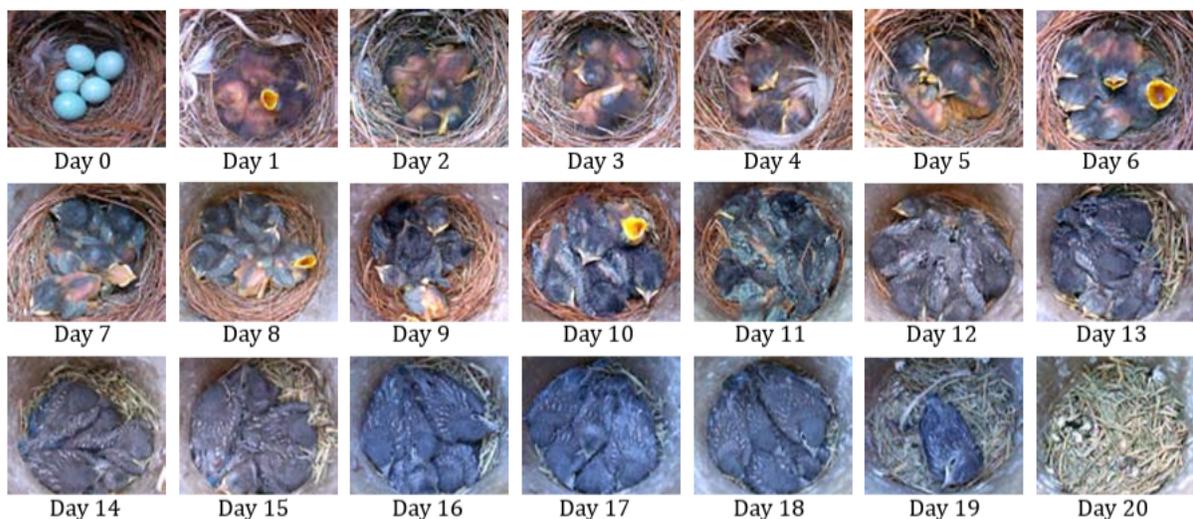
The Eastern Bluebird breeding season in our area of Florida is just getting started and our Pasco Audubon Bluebird Project activities are right on schedule. Our nesting boxes are cleaned, the necessary repairs to boxes and predator guards are completed, and some new boxes are installed and ready for nesting birds. We made updates to our Pasco Audubon nesting boxes in Heartwood Preserve, W.H. Jack Mitchell Jr. Park, and Jay B. Starkey Wilderness Park.

While the primary focus of the Pasco Audubon Bluebird Project is to provide nesting boxes for Eastern Bluebirds, other secondary cavity nesting birds can and do, use our nesting boxes. A secondary cavity nesting bird is a bird that uses an existing cavity to build its nest in instead of digging its own. These birds use cavities that were already made by other birds, like woodpeckers, or are found in natural structures. They may also use human-made cavities like our nesting boxes.

We install our nesting boxes because natural nesting cavities are in shorter supply than food and water in many areas, thereby limiting bluebird populations. Our nesting boxes mimic old woodpecker holes and provide safe nesting cavities for these birds, especially with predator guards that protect the nests from snakes, raccoons, and other predators. In addition to Eastern Bluebirds, Tufted Titmice and Carolina Chickadees readily use our nesting boxes, and, although rather rare, there is always a possibility that a pair of Carolina Wrens or Brown-headed Nuthatches will use one of our boxes.

Now that our nesting boxes are installed and ready for bluebirds to use, we follow bluebird landlord “best practices” and complete a monitoring check every 7 to 10 days during the breeding season which runs from January through October. It is possible for us to open the box and inspect the contents because songbirds have a poor sense of smell and will not abandon the nest due to monitoring the nest, eggs, or chicks. (continued on the next page)

Eastern Bluebird Daily Growth



All photos courtesy of Piet Zimmerman

I use this chart to estimate the age of the growing babies and avoid opening the box for a week after day 17.

Two questions that I am often asked is why do we monitor the nesting boxes and what do we do when “monitoring”? According to the North American Bluebird Society, monitored Eastern Bluebird boxes generally have a significantly higher success rate compared to non-monitored boxes, with studies showing that actively checking nest boxes can increase the chances of successful fledgling production by a substantial margin, sometimes even exceeding 90% success in monitored boxes compared to much lower rates in unmonitored ones; this is primarily due to the ability to address potential issues like predator intrusions, nest failures, and competitor species taking over the box when monitored regularly.

So, research has proven that the efforts involved in monitoring our nesting boxes are necessary to continue the historical successes of this project.

Actions performed for each nesting box check are to

1. assess the condition of the box and fix it, when necessary,
2. ensure that House Sparrows are not taking over the box,
3. remove Cuban tree frogs if found,
4. remove wasps and ants if found,
5. remove blow flies if found,
6. Remove unhatched eggs or dead chicks,
7. ensure that predators such as snakes, raccoons, and squirrels have not raided the nest,
8. clean out the box after the babies have fledged, and
9. record the results.

We are starting our 2025 nesting season with 32 nesting boxes installed at 8 locations. Last year, we helped our birds fledge 93 babies.

I invite you to join me on a monitoring day and experience the joy of helping this beautiful bird flourish in our area of Florida.



Eastern Bluebird & Upgraded Box at Heartwood





Eastern Towhee



Brown-headed Nuthatch

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY - Audubon is looking for Volunteers to participate in *Climate Watch*, a community science program that is monitoring how some of our birds are responding to climate change.

We are all very aware that many North American birds are becoming increasingly vulnerable to extinction due to climate change. But at the same time, we probably ask ourselves “What can I as an individual do about this growing threat?” Well, here’s an opportunity to use your day-to-day birding activities to help Audubon scientists monitor how some of our most common birds are responding to climate change and shifting their ranges. This initiative, known as **Climate Watch**, requires participants to conduct surveys each year during two distinct seasons: winter (January 15th to February 15th) and summer (May 15th to June 15th). In Florida, **Climate Watch** focuses on monitoring three regularly occurring species: Eastern Bluebird, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and Eastern Towhee, all of which are year-round residents of Pasco County.

Audubon provides volunteers with maps of locations to survey. Using these maps participants survey appropriate habitat within a 10 x 10 km square. This involves conducting 12 point counts of five minutes each, recording the number and species of all birds seen or heard within 100 meters. All 12 point counts are carried out on the same day and can usually be completed within two to four hours.

Anyone interested in participating in this important initiative can find more information at:

<https://www.audubon.org/community-science/climate-watch> or contact Don Fraser at PascoAudubonConservation@gmail.com.

Winter Shorebird Survey - February 7-13 2025

Thanks to all who helped with the survey this year (Jo and Merl Hubbard, Pamela Graber, Pat Goldberg, Peter Day, Alice Jewel, Kimberly Snaric, Christine Rowland and Anthony Marella). A report on our results will be included in next month’s newsletter.



Marbled Godwits

Hummingbirds are Arriving Soon! by Christine Rowland

The first Ruby-throated Hummingbirds will be arriving in our area in the next few weeks. They will have undergone a long and exhausting migration across the Gulf from the Yucatan Peninsula, and will have lost about half their body weight in doing so. They will be desperate for nourishment, and with recent frosts delaying the blooms on some of their favorite plants, your feeders will be very important.

Last year my first backyard hummingbird showed up on March 10th. You may find that the first visitors don't stick around more than a few days - they're on their way farther north. I suspect that my seasonal residents don't arrive till later in the month or even April. But having the feeders up helps to welcome them to your backyard.

A few feeder reminders:

Please use only refined sugar - brown sugar and honey can increase the likelihood of problems with fungus. Use one part sugar, to 4 parts water to make your nectar. Do not add dye.

Personally, I just put the sugar in a measuring jug, add about 3 parts of boiling water, stir like crazy for a minute, then once the sugar is fully dissolved I add the final part of water cold. I then add it to the clean feeder. This method reduces the time it takes for the nectar to cool and to get the feeders out.

Do remember to change the nectar every 4 days or so, cleaning the feeder carefully with each change.



Ruby-throated Hummingbird - male



Ruby-throated Hummingbird - female

Looking Ahead - April 2025 Events

- April 5 - 8am Bird Walk in Starkey Park
- 11am Season Finale - Costa Rica: Birding and Photography Travel
The Nature and Wildlife of Tampa Bay Photography Competition Awards
- April 12 - 8am Birding by Bike on the Pinellas Trail with Bob Burkard
- April 26 8am Field Trip Fort De Soto for Spring Migration*

*Please note that this event is sensitive to Fort De Soto closures - please stay in touch for any updates

Birding 102 meets every Wednesday morning at 8am to bird a local hotspot. Contact president@pascoaudubon.com to be added to the contact list for weekly specifics.

Pasco Audubon Board of Directors

Christine Rowland, President - president@pascoaudubon.com

Don Fraser, Vice President and Conservation Chair PascoAudubonConservation@gmail.com

Joanne Chamberlain, Treasurer - treasurer@pascoaudubon.com

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