



April 2025 Newsletter

PASCO AUDUBON

Formerly known as West Pasco Audubon

Upcoming Events

Saturday, April 5th

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

Costa Rica: Birding and Photography + the 2025 Nature and Wildlife of Tampa Bay Photography Awards- 11am in the Starkey Education Center p.1

Saturday, April 12th

8am Birding by Bike along the Pinellas Trail p. 2

Sunday, April 27th

8am Field Trip to Fort De Soto for Migration - p. 2



© Noriko Buckles 2025

Yellow-throated Toucan by Noriko Buckles

Costa Rica: Birding & Photography Presentation + 2025 Photography Awards

Have you thought about taking an international trip for birding and/or photography? If so, our April presentation may be perfect for you. A group of us from Pasco Audubon, including several photographers, embarked on a trip to Costa Rica with Holbrook Travel. The experience of the amazing diversity of birds was exhilarating, but we were able to experience much more than birds with breathtaking scenery, and opportunities to see monkeys, sloths, butterflies and other wildlife. At our April meeting we will be sharing some of our best and favorite photographs from the trip, along with some anecdotes of our experiences - we're looking forward to sharing Costa Rica with you.

We'll also be presenting awards to the winners in this year's **Nature and Wildlife of Tampa Bay Photography Competition**. We'll have 10 award winners who'll be receiving their certificates, ribbons, and prizes and we hope you'll be with us for the event!

When? Saturday, April 5th at 11am

Where? Starkey Environmental Education Center, Starkey Park

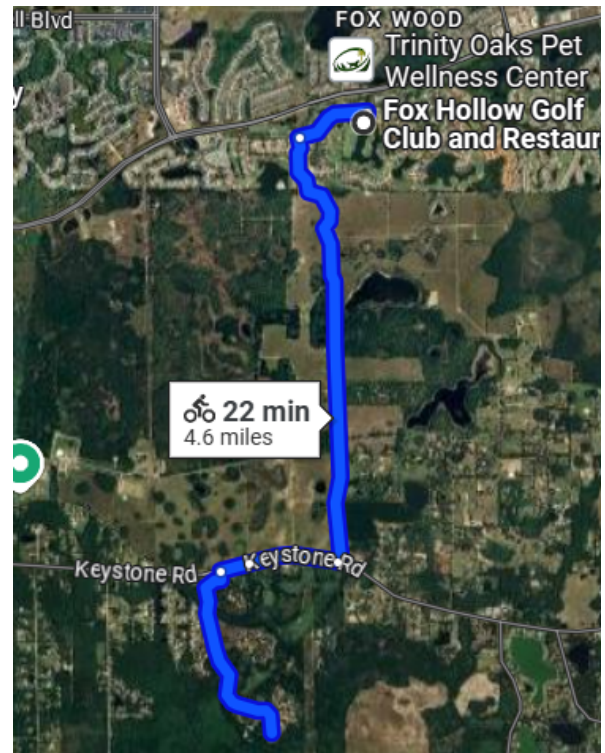


Collared Redstart by Christine Rowland

April 12th Birding by Bike – Along the Pinellas Trail by Bob Burkard

We are going to the Pinellas trail for our April 8th Outing.

I really like this location. We start at the Brooker Creek Preserve parking lot at 8:00 am and bike up to the trail. It is a great opportunity to see a large variety of birds including a number of my favorites including Eastern Bluebirds, Loggerhead Shrikes, Eastern Meadowlarks, American Kestrels, Bald Eagles and Red-tailed Hawks.



Field Trip: Spring Migration at Fort De Soto - April 27th

Migration time is approaching, and once again we will visit Fort De Soto, the mecca of Bay Area migration birding, to celebrate the passage of migrant birds through our region. We normally select the third weekend in April for our trip, but as that is Easter weekend we've bumped it out by a week, and have selected Sunday, April 27th. We will meet under the oaks at the east end of the East Beach parking lot at 7:30am.

As you probably know, Fort De Soto was hit very hard by hurricanes last season and was closed for many months, reopening in stages. Kimberly and I (Christine) took a scouting trip to see what it now looks like. While extensive damage is evident - particularly in the trails off the Bay Pier parking lot, almost everything (including restrooms) is open. Vegetation looks sparse in areas we are accustomed to seeing lush foliage. On an optimistic note, we saw the first hints of migrants coming through and still anticipate seeing a good range of species on the day. For a clearer idea of what you might expect to see, visit our eBird list from last year's trip at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S169682548>.



Left: Cape May Warbler



Right: Indigo Bunting

The People's Choice is Underway - Vote Now!

While the judges have already submitted their evaluations of each of this year's photographs, there's still one more award to be decided. Have you voted in this year's **People's Choice Award** yet? If not, there's still time! Voting is open until the end of the day on Wednesday April 2nd. Just click on this link https://pascoaudubon.com/Contest2025/2025_contest_entries.html, view all 58 photographs submitted to this year's **Nature and Wildlife of Tampa Bay Photography Competition**. Once in the gallery, view all of the entries then vote for your favorite at the 'click here to vote' button at the bottom of the page.

All competition winners will be announced at our April 5th event (see the front page) receiving cash prizes, certificates and ribbons. Many thanks to Hal Sigurdson, who took on the competition coordinator role this year - the competition could not have happened without him.

We'd also like to take this opportunity to say a huge "thank you" to this year's sponsors (logos below) **Pasco Camera Exchange (Jim and Annette Smetzer)**, **Cary Street Partners (Jason Walters and Steven Cere)**, **CPR Tampa (Kimberly and Jay Snaric)**, and **Mike and Laurie Kell**. And of course, **Pasco Fine Arts Council**, our partners in this venture from our very first competition.



Mike and Laurie Kell

Report: Field Trip to The Celery Fields, March 15, 2025 by Christine Rowland



Osprey by Noriko Buckles



Least Bittern by Noriko Buckles

On March 15th a group of 17 of us set out on our Celery Fields field trip. It was a beautiful day with blue skies, and we were very fortunate to see over 50 species of birds. Thanks to the Sarasota Audubon docents, who staffed the Raymond St. boardwalk for their help. Giving us good looks on the day were the Gray-headed Swamphen, Purple Gallinule, Black-necked Stilts, and numerous Blue-winged Teal. We were also able to see some of the more reticent marsh birds including Least Bittern and Sora.

But we had some great good fortune with a couple of unexpected birds, a Crested Caracara who flew over our heads and is nesting in an adjacent field, and and those who hung in there till the end were rewarded for their efforts by a Tropical Kingbird, that made a late appearance initially in a conflict of sorts with a Boat-tailed Grackle, drawing attention to itself, and then stuck around for a bit while we all got our photographs. Check out our eBird list at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S218712393> . Thanks to Noriko Buckles and Anthony Marella for sharing their wonderful photographs!



Tropical Kingbird by Anthony Marella



Gray-headed Swamphen by Anthony Marella

Report: March 8th Birding by Bike in Starkey Wilderness Park by Bob Burkard

Our March 8th Pasco Audubon Birding by Bike outing was in Starkey Wilderness Park. We biked five miles back into the park with a stop at the power lines. We counted 43 species including Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Brown-headed Nuthatches, Bald Eagles, and Eastern Towhees.

The weather was perfect. Funny, even though we observed hundreds of birds, it was strangely quiet with not a lot of singing.



Eastern Towhee by Bob Burkard



Brown-headed Nuthatches by Bob Burkard

Pasco Audubon Bluebird Project Updates by Bob Burkard

The Eastern Bluebird breeding season in our area of Florida is well under way and we have nests in over a dozen of our nesting boxes when last checked. Of these eight already have eggs or babies.

What an exciting and fun time of year. Check out the amazing amount of information that Mike Kell has recorded on this project since its inception on the Pasco Audubon website at <https://www.pascoaudubon.com/Bluebirds/BBIndex.html>

Ken Landry and I added predator guards to the three nesting boxes at the Airpeka Sandhills Preserve, the three nesting boxes at the Veterans Memorial Park (Hudson), and to the two bird nesting boxes at the Trinity College of Florida locations. The nesting boxes at the Airpeka and the Veterans locations are monitored by Judith Leslie Zollo and have been highly successful Eastern Bluebird nesting sites for over 10 years.

I try to monitor each box every 7 to 10 days and welcome anyone who would like to join me at the Starkey Wilderness Park location. Please send me an email at robertburkard9@gmail.com if you would like to participate and learn more about this rewarding conservation project.

It is a wonderful opportunity to observe the great work that your Pasco Audubon members have done to support Eastern Bluebirds in our area. (see photos on the opposite page)



Nest Box with 4 Eastern Bluebird Eggs

Pasco Birding Backpack Project 2025 by Mike Kell

In 2022 Robyn Powers, Pasco County Librarian, approached Mike Kell about a Birding Backpack Project that would provide backpacks for local residents to loan from their local libraries.

Our chapter immediately got involved and funded the first six backpacks. An additional grant from Florida Audubon was acquired early in 2023 providing seven more. These backpacks include one pair of adult binoculars, one pair of child's binoculars, an identification book for adults and one for identification book for children. These backpacks have been placed at the local county libraries and can be checked out for two weeks and extended once.

Thirteen Birding Backpacks were provided to the Pasco County Library system by early 2023. We recently learned that during 2024, these 13 backpacks were checked out 57 times and renewed for another 65 times. During this time only one backpack was returned missing an Identification book, which the library quickly replaced. We were really happy to learn that the backpacks are being well used, and wanted to share the good news with you.



Backpack with contents



COLOMBIA with Pasco Audubon



Birding the Central Andes

March 8-16, 2026

\$3,925 per person plus airfare, based on 8 participants

With over 1,900 avian species—more than any other country in the world—Colombia is a birder's paradise waiting to be discovered. This 9-day program focuses on the highlights of the Central Andes region, famed for its high level of species diversity, including the Otún Quimbaya Flora and Fauna Sanctuary, Río Blanco Reserve, and Los Nevados National Park. Explore Andean cloud forest, farmland, and páramo habitats in search of an array of tropical avifauna, including flycatchers, hummingbirds, tanagers, toucans, and more.

Throughout your journey, meet members of local communities and learn about conservation efforts to use birding as a sustainable development resource.

Program Highlights

- Seek out a variety of Colombia's rare and endemic species, such as the Cauca Guan, Chestnut Wood-Quail, Crested Ant-Tanager, and Buffy Helmetcrest.
- Explore the cloud forest at a relatively new birding location, La Finca El Cortaderal, where a population of critically endangered Fuertes's Parrot was discovered.
- Look for antpittas in Río Blanco Natural Reserve, a designated Important Bird Area.
- Venture into one of the most beautiful places in Colombia, Los Nevados National Park, which features stunning views of three snow-capped active volcanoes and an impressive variety of unique flora and avifauna.

What's Included

- Accommodations
- Private transportation
- Meals and Beverages with meals
- Most Tips except Local Expert Guide and Driver

International Birding Travel by Christine Rowland



Buff-throated Saltator by Pat Goldberg



Olive-backed Euphonia by Pat Goldberg

This spring Pasco Audubon partnered with Holbrook Travel to facilitate two groups of birders visiting Costa Rica. As we are presenting our photographs at some length at our upcoming April meeting (see the front page) we are not going into any detail here this month. However, the response from participants was so positive that we have gone ahead and booked 2 trips for next year. You may have noticed the 'save the date' flyer on the previous page for our Birding the Central Andes trip, but as of yesterday we can also confirm that we have been able to secure a second trip - Birding Southern Costa Rica. This second trip will be from April 16 - 26, 2026 and will once again feature our super-star guide, Jorge Monge.

If you think you may be interested in either of these trips, please let me know at president@pascoaudubon.com, and I will keep you apprised when the webpages with full details are available for each trip, along with the dates that registration will open. We predict that both trips will fill quickly.



Green Basilisk by Pat Goldberg



Rufous Motmot by Pat Goldberg

Winter Shorebird Survey - February 7-13 2025



Marbled Godwits at Fred Howard Park, 2-07-25

This year Pasco Audubon surveyed 5 sites during the Winter Shorebird Survey window of February 7-13. As is our tradition, we have a group of us who survey Fred Howard Park, and this year the group consisted of Peter Day, Pat Goldberg, Pamela Graber, Jo and Merl Hubbard, Alice Jewel and Christine Rowland on February 7th. The highlight was a flock of 31 Marbled Godwits. We found 17 species being surveyed for the count, but only one was a 'focal species' - Black Skimmers. We counted only 3 Black Skimmers on the count, and none of them were banded. In contrast, we had counted 155 skimmers, 3 of which were banded, during last February's count. Last year we had also recorded 2 Piping Plovers (another focal species). This year we saw none. Two years ago we logged 3 focal species - American Oystercatcher, Piping Plover and Black Skimmer. So overall we are seeing a decline among some of the species of particular concern to FWC in this location.

Back in Pasco County, I surveyed SunWest Park on the afternoon of Monday, February 10th. SunWest is best for shorebirds when the tide is high, as it is a refuge when there is little sand available elsewhere. There has been a lot of construction going on at SunWest recently, and it seems that we see less bird diversity with each passing year. No Wilson's Plovers were counted again this year. While birders have occasionally been able to sight them here, they are a far rarer occurrence than in the past. Shorebirds were largely found out on the booms, where I was able to count 150 Dunlin, and smaller numbers of Willet, Western Sandpipers, Semipalmated Plovers and Turnstones. Much of the north beach was fenced off, but I was granted permission to enter for the survey. I was surprised to find 51 Herring Gulls (a high number for this species), 250 Ring-billed Gulls, 210 Laughing Gull, 76 Royal Terns, 9 Caspian Terns and a paltry 3 Forster's Terns. So in spite of the construction, some birds persist. Every time a truck filled with sand rolled through the beach most of the gulls and terns would flush, making the count particularly challenging. Overall the total number of birds at SunWest was 809, exceeding the total number at Fred Howard a few days before by a significant margin.

The Green Key (Robert K. Rees Memorial Park) survey on Tuesday February 11th yielded only a handful of gulls and terns - no shorebirds at all. Hudson Beach Park on the 13th was little better, but did have a solo Black Skimmer.

Dunlin, Western Sandpiper and Semipalmated Plover at SunWest on February 10, 2024



Looking Ahead - May 2025 Events

May 3rd - 8am Bird Walk in Starkey Park

May 10th - 8am Birding by Bike at Flatwoods Park Trail, Thonotosassa

May 24th - 8am Field Trip - East Pasco

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

Kimberly Snaric, Secretary - pascoaudubon@gmail.com

Mike Kell, Web Master jmike65@gmail.com

Patricia Goldberg, Special Projects projects@westpascoaudubon.com

JoAnn Sinatra, At-Large

Ken Landry, At-Large

Other Important Contacts:

Fran Sigurdson, Membership Chair fsigurds@gmail.com

Bob Burkard, Birding by Bike and The Bluebird Project robertburkard9@gmail.com

Hal Sigurdson, Photography Competition Coordinator PascoAudubonPhotos@gmail.com