



February 2026 Newsletter

PASCO AUDUBON

Upcoming Events

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Starkey Wilderness Park.
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Groove-billed Ani at Fort De Soto Park by Christine Rowland

Birding Fort DeSoto Park **with Ron Smith**

We're excited to welcome Ron Smith as our featured presenter on February 7th. Ron will be telling us all about Fort De Soto, the foremost eBird hotspot in Florida. Ron has seen 299 bird species in the park - more than any other birder, and has some great tips to share with us. Fort De Soto's location on the southern tip of Pinellas County has meant that it receives a huge number of migrant birds in the spring and fall, and an uncommon number of vagrants. Additionally, it provides valuable breeding grounds for many shorebird species on North Beach and Outback Key.

We hope that you take the time out to join us and listen to one of the region's foremost birders and to learn more about his special place. As always, our meeting will take place at 11am in the Starkey Environmental Education Center and all are welcome.

We'll take our morning walk before Ron's talk. Meet in the Education Center parking lot at 8am. Last month we marveled as 1000 Tree Swallows congregated over Grassy Lake, and then had another wonderful opportunity to view an American Bittern on another park pond. Come and find out what we see this month.

Birding-by-Bike: February 14th Good Neighbor Trail - Brooksville

For our February Birding-by-Bike outing we are visiting a new location, the Good Neighbor Trail in Brooksville. We will meet at the Brooksville train station (28 Russel Street) at 8:00 am.

I am excited to see this area. eBird reports that 60 species of birds were sighted over the last 60 days including Northern Harriers, Bald Eagles, Red-headed Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers, Merlins, and many different sparrow species.

Please email me at robertburkard9@gmail.com or text me at 610-256-7781 to let me know if you will be joining me.



Red-headed Woodpecker

Photography Club: Updates and Field Trip to John Chesnut Sr, Park by Noriko Buckles

Our next meeting will be on February 14th at 10:30 am at New Port Richey Library. We will take a look at photographs taken by the members at the January outing to the John Chesnut SR park. Also, we will cover what we should look for in any photography competition.

The March outing will be to either Sims park or the Anclote Gulf Park and Pier on the 28th. This will be an afternoon outing. Please look for further information. The April meeting will be on April 18th at 10 am at New Port Richey Library.



Common Gallinule by Noriko Buckles



Water Lily by Noriko Buckles

February 21st, Field Trip to Paynes Prairie, Alachua

We have not visited Alachua County in a couple of years. Paynes Prairie is a vast property with several well-known trails. We will hold off announcing the Saturday morning meet-up spot as we will be following rarity reports on eBird to decide which trail may be the most productive for us on the day.

Several of us are also planning to drive up the day before, in order to take the opportunity to look around a bit more and to be well-rested for our Saturday walk. Some of us are planning to walk the Bolen Bluff Trail (on Paynes Prairie) from 4:30pm on Friday the 20th in hopes of seeing the overwintering Short-eared Owl. Another recent trip on that trail on a Friday evening yielded, in addition to the Short-eared Owl, Eastern Whip-poor-will, American Barn Owl, Barred Owl and Eastern Screech-Owl. Of course, every day is different and there are no guarantees. To register for this trip and to receive detailed plans closer to the date, please email me at christirow@aol.com.

February 28th: Field Trip to The Celery Fields, Sarasota

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. 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/S218712393>. Last year our list of 52 species included a Sora, Black-necked Stilts, Gray-headed Swamphen, Northern Harrier, a Crested Caracara and a Tropical Kingbird. Some of the special birds currently being seen there include Crested Caracara, Bronzed Cowbird and Lincoln's Sparrow.

The main address for The Celery Fields is 6799 Palmer Blvd, Sarasota, FL 34240, and there are restrooms available off 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 to christirow@aol.com, and 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.



Gray-headed Swamphen at The Celery Fields

New Conservation Project: Purple Martin House Opening Celebration February 4th

Please join us this Wednesday, February 4th, to celebrate the completion and installation of our first Purple Martin house. The celebration will take place in WH Jack Mitchell Park off Little Road at 9am. We'll be listening to Bob Burkard tell us more about these special birds and how we are supporting them, and we will have a chance to provide one of the finishing touches by lining the nests with pine needles. If you'd also like to take a bird walk, arrive at 8am, when our 102/Wednesday birding group will be birding the park.

Bob Burkard has built several Purple Martin houses for his homes across the years, but this will be his first in Florida. There was a tremendous amount of work involved and we are very grateful for Bob's skill, effort and commitment. There's room inside for 18 Purple Martin families. This project provided a great opportunity for our members to assist with the installation - thanks to Rick Chamberlain, Joe Colantonio, Tom Crites, Ken Landry and Anthony Marella for helping Bob with the installation.

Audubon Florida has asked chapters to prioritize support for Purple Martins, a rapidly declining species. Purple Martins are dependent on humans for their nests throughout the eastern United States. So back in November the Board decided to invest in building a house. As with the Bluebird Project, we plan to update you with news of the box as we hope it is occupied by Purple Martins soon. The first martins have already been seen in the area.



Bob and team raise our first Purple Martin House.

Report: January 11th Birding-by-Bike on the Pinellas Trail by Bob Burkard

Phil Duncan, Ken Landry and I met at the Brooker Creek parking area and biked & birded up the Pinellas Trail to Trinity Blvd. It was a good day for sparrows. We identified Savannah Sparrows, Grasshopper Sparrows, and a Marsh Wren, and Phil photographed a White-crowned Sparrow. Phil gave me some photography pointers which helped me get some great pictures of Eastern Meadowlarks, Kestrels, and a nesting Bald Eagle. We identified 38 different species of birds.



White-crowned Sparrow by Phil Duncan



Grasshopper Sparrow by Bob Burkard

Report: January 17th - Circle B Bar and Lake Morton Field Trip

On January 17th a group of 16 of us met up at Circle B Bar Reserve. It was a chilly 46F start to the morning, but we had sun and a positive attitude. We broke into two groups - a longer and shorter walk group - thanks to Mike Ranck for leading the longer group. We began with some passerines including Blue-headed Vireo and Orange-crowned Warbler. A few at the front of the group caught sight of a female Painted Bunting.

While it seemed that we missed some of the birds we normally see on these visits, we still found 60+ species of birds, along with some alligators and raccoons too. By the time we arrived at the discovery center, we were ready for our picnic, and it had warmed up considerably. You can view our trip list with photographs at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S294792946>.

Following lunch, most of us headed over to nearby Lake Morton, in Lakeland. We found American White Pelicans, both Mute and Black Swans, and lots of Ring-necked Ducks with 3 Ruddy Ducks, two of whom were drakes. Our illustrated list for Lake Morton is at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S294804772>.

(See photos from this trip on p. 6)



Black-crowned Night-Heron at Circle B Bar Reserve



Green Heron at Circle B Bar Reserve



Ruddy Duck on Lake Morton



Mute Swan on Lake Moreton

SAVE THE DATE - April 11th

Nature and Wildlife of Tampa Bay Photography Competition

This year's photography competition details will be coming out shortly via a special email, and will be posted to our website. Winners will be announced and prizes awarded on April 11th, but submission dates, rules and registration will be released soon.

Florida Winter Shorebird Survey - February 6-12 by Christine Rowland

Every year, beginning on the first Friday in February (this year February 6-12), we participate with coastal Audubon chapters around Florida in the Winter Shorebird Survey. The primary objective of the Winter Shorebird Survey is to better understand the winter distribution of shorebirds and seabirds in Florida, and the survey serves as a statewide snapshot. This annual survey allows us to recognize long-term trends or changes in winter population sizes and distribution. It also helps us identify key wintering sites – information that is much needed to guide future conservation efforts, particularly for state or federally-listed focal species.

Here in Pasco we monitor several sites. The first site we were asked to take on back in 2019 was Fred Howard Park, near Tarpon Springs (actually in Pinellas County). After that year we took on Pasco coastal sites that had previously not been included. These include SunWest Park, Hudson Beach, Green Key and Key Vista/Anclote Gulf Park. Pasco is also included via north Anclote Key Preserve, part of the State Park. Anclote Key is monitored for this purpose by state park personnel. Exact dates of each location for the survey are determined by considerations such as tides, in order to achieve optimal results.

If you enjoy birding our coastline, know your shorebirds and are willing to help with this year's surveys, please contact Christine at christirow@aol.com.



Marbled Godwits at Fred Howard Park on the 2025 Winter Shorebird Survey

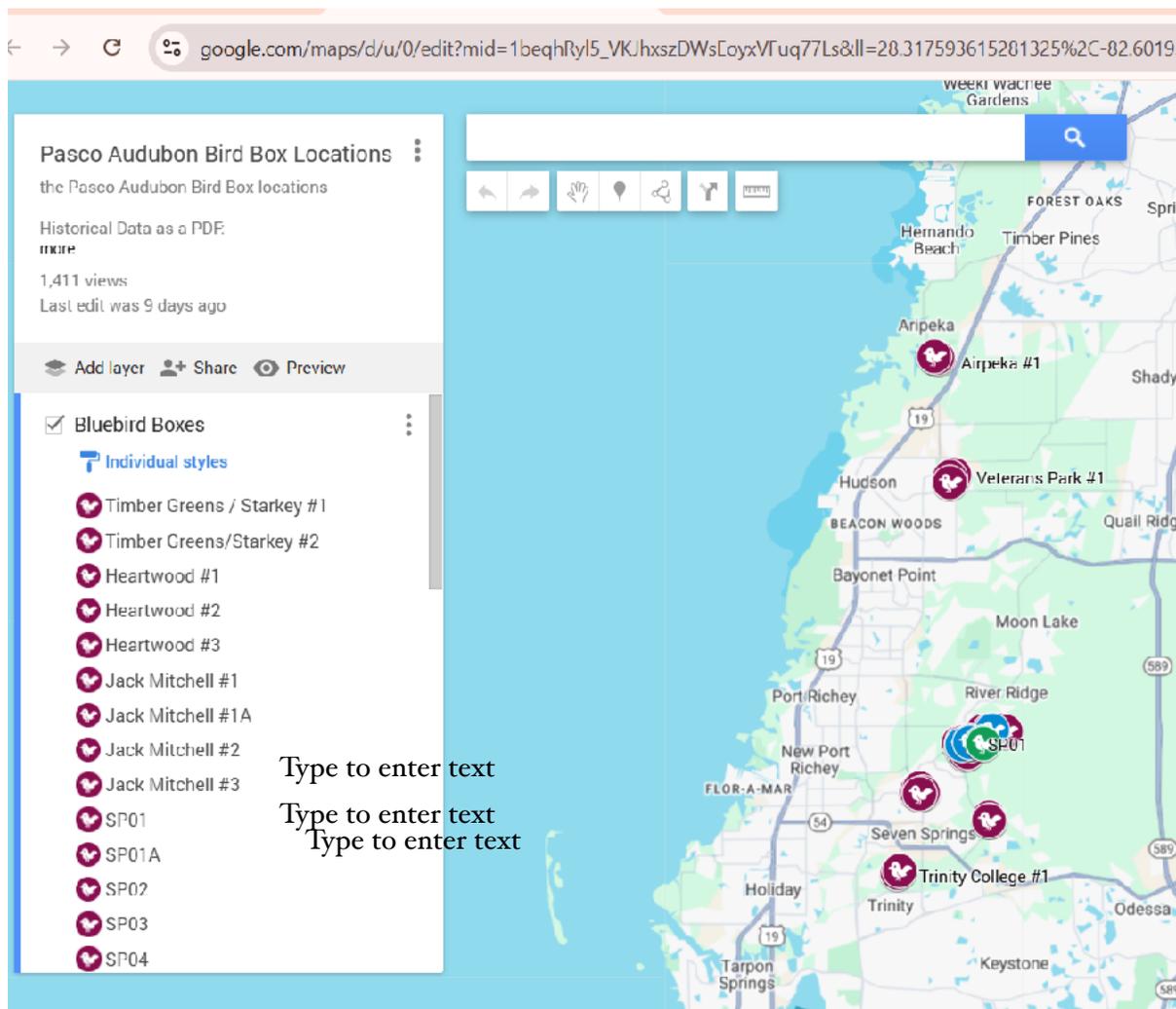


The Bluebird Project Update by Bob Burkard

This is a busy time of year for our Bluebird Conservation project. We are replacing three bird boxes and poles at both the Aripeka and Veterans Park locations, and adding two boxes to our Seven Springs location.

Our local bluebirds start breeding in early February and can have as many as three broods, with the breeding season ending by September. Most nesting activity in Pasco county occurs from February through June. So, our nest monitors are getting excited about our 2026 season.

As the season progresses, you may want to check out our interactive nest box location map on our Bluebird Conservation Project page on the pascoaudubon.com website.



Remember our December meeting when Tom Crites won the door prize - his very own Eastern Bluebird House? Well Bob Burkard stopped by his home to install it for him and here it is!

Tom - we hope you have your very own resident Eastern Bluebird family soon!



Tom with his new Eastern Bluebird House

Birding-by-Bike Schedule for 2026

The start time for all rides is currently 8am. Please do check the schedule with our monthly newsletter or Bob as sometimes changes are necessary.

Month	Date	Location
January	Saturday, January 10, 2026	Pinellas Trail - Meet at Brooker Creek Preserve Parking lot
February	Saturday, February 14, 2026	Good Neighbor Trail, Brooksville - Meet at 28 Russell Street, Brooksville
March	Sunday, March 15, 2026	Jay B Starkey Wilderness Park - Meet at Education Center at the Park
April	Saturday, April 11, 2026	Pinellas Trail - Meet at Brooker Creek Preserve Parking lot
April	Wednesday, April 15, 2026	Ft. DeSoto
May	Saturday, May 9, 2026	Chassawahowitzka Wildlife Area
June	Saturday, June 13, 2026	Pinellas Trail - Meet at Brooker Creek Preserve Parking lot
June	Tuesday, June 23, 2026	Flatwoods Park Trail, Thonotossassa - Carpool to area
July		No Birding by Bike in July
August	Sunday, August 16, 2026	Jay B Starkey Wilderness Park - Meet at Education Center at the Park
September	Saturday, September 12, 2026	Pinellas Trail - Meet at Brooker Creek Preserve Parking lot
October	Saturday, October 10, 2026	Chassawahowitzka Wildlife Management Area
November	Saturday, November 14, 2026	Pinellas Trail - Meet at Brooker Creek Preserve Parking lot
December	Sunday, December 13, 2026	Good Neighbor Trail, Brooksville - Carpool to area

Looking Ahead to March...

March 7th - 8am - Monthly walk in Starkey Park

11am - Feature Presentation: Tampa Bay Watch with Tara Kok, Native Plant Programming Manager

March 7-16 - International Trip: Columbia: Birding the Central Andes

March 15th - Birding-by-Bike at Jay B. Starkey Wilderness Park

March 21st - Joining Hernando Audubon's "Welcome Back Songbirds" festival at Chinsegut

March 28th - Field Trip to Felts Audubon Preserve, Manatee County

Pasco Audubon Board of Directors

Christine Rowland, President - christirow@aol.com (temporary, while Audubon email unavailable)

Don Fraser, Vice President and Conservation Chair - dmfraser31@gmail.com

Joanne Chamberlain, Treasurer - treasurer@pascoaudubon.com

Phil Duncan, Secretary - pascoaudubon@gmail.com

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Patricia Goldberg, Special Projects projects@westpascoaudubon.com

JoAnn Sinatra, At-Large

Ken Landry, At-Large

Bob Burkard - Birding-by-Bike, Bluebird Project & Purple Martin Project robertburkard@gmail.com

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Hal Sigurdson, Photography Competition Coordinator PascoAudubonPhotos@gmail.com

Noriko Buckles, Pasco Audubon Photography Club Coordinator nbucklesphoto@gmail.com

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