



January 2025 Newsletter

PASCO AUDUBON

Formerly known as West Pasco Audubon

Upcoming Events

Saturday, January 4th

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

Talk: Kestrel Kindergarten with Barbara Walker - 11am in the Starkey Education Center

Monday, January 6th

11am Nature Photography Workshop Session 3 - Starkey Education Center - details p.2

Saturday, January 11th

Field Trip to Circle B Bar Preserve - Polk County - p, 3

Sunday, January 12th

Birding by Bike - Chassahowitzka WMD - Details p.2

January 24-26th - Field Trip to Miami/South Florida p. 4

January Talk – Kestrel Kindergarten with Barbara Walker

On Saturday, January 4th at 11am we're kicking off 2025 with Barbara Walker, who'll be bringing along some of her rescue American Kestrels. Southeastern American Kestrels are a threatened species in Florida, and live and breed right here in our county. To increase awareness of this species plight, Barbara has created "The Kestrel Kindergarten", a particularly cute group of avian ambassadors. Join us to learn about their rescues, how she cares for this species in captivity, all about their extra-curricular activities and perhaps get to interact with one of them.

Kestrel boxes are free to qualified property owners and she is seeking volunteers to help monitor those boxes once installed. Locations are often selected by previous rescue locations, many being in New Port

Richey and throughout Pasco County. This conservation program is sponsored by Duke Energy and made possible by the Boy Scouts.

And do feel free to join us for our first monthly walk of the year at 8am - meet in the education center parking lot - Pamela Graber will lead this walk.



Nature Photography Workshops Sessions 2 and 3 January 6 and January 20

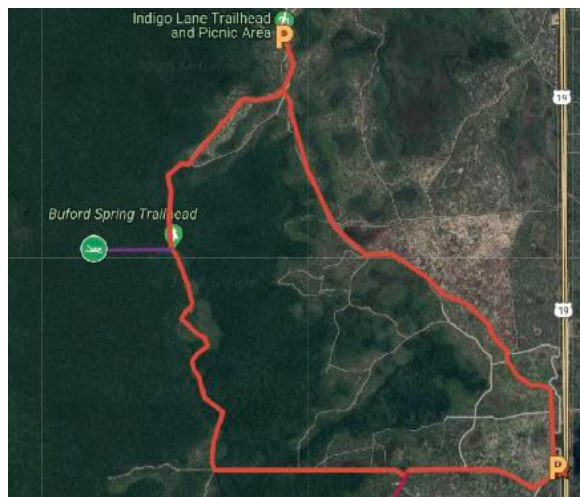
Looking to sharpen your photography skills in the new year? We have not one workshop but two this month. Patricia Goldberg's third photography workshop, focused on helping you use aperture and shutter speed creatively and effectively, will be held in the Starkey Environmental Education Center on Monday, January 6th from 11am - 2pm. Then on Monday, January 20th, Pat will focus on recognizing and using different lighting situations to your advantage, with special tips and tricks for challenging situations, also meeting from 11am - 2pm. Both sessions will be held in the Starkey Environmental Education Center in Starkey Park. Questions? Reach out to Pat at projects@westpascoaudubon.com

January 12th Birding by Bike Outing Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area with Bob Burkard

For our January 12th 2025 Pasco Audubon Birding by Bike outing, we are visiting a new location for our Birding by Bike adventures and are traveling to the Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area which is located 15 miles south of Crystal River. EBird indicates that there are 59 species of birds that are likely to be seen in this area, and a few of the reported birds that we hope to see and photograph include Northern Flicker, Merlin, and Red-headed Woodpecker.

The trail surface is hard-packed (not paved) but is not too difficult. Please bring water and snacks. This website is a good source of information on biking in the Chassahowitzka Wilderness Management Area: <https://www.10ofloridatrails.com/eco-biking/chassahowitzkawma.htm#section1>

We will meet at 7:30 AM in the Publix Supermarket at Fairway Oaks Plaza parking lot (Little Road and Hudson) and carpool up to the Chassahowitzka Wilderness Management Area. For those of you meeting at the location, we are starting at the access point off US 19 near Centralia Rd. There is a hunter's sign-in and day-fee pay station with parking, restrooms, and picnic facilities. There is a \$6 fee per vehicle for parking at the check-in station. Please reach out to me at robertburkard9@gmail.com if you have any additional questions.



Saturday, January 11: Field Trip to Circle B Bar Reserve

One of our perennial favorite field trips is Circle B. Bar Reserve in Polk County. We typically find a wide range of birds here, supplemented by other species such as raccoons and alligators. For those who have not been before, we usually break into two groups, depending on the length of walk you'd like to undertake. The shorter walk is about 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 (such as Barred Owls and Painted Bunting) in the area around the trailhead and welcome center.

The walk will take us across marsh land 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 54 species of birds, including Purple Gallinules, Bonaparte's Gulls, American White Pelican, Northern Harriers.

There are portable restrooms at the trailhead, as the welcome center with regular facilities doesn't open till later. 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 bring all you'll need with you. Please do not leave valuables in your car in this location.

Last year a number of us decided to continue our trip at nearby Lake Morton, and saw a good selection of ducks in addition to a group of American White Pelicans at very close quarters. We'll do this again this year for anyone interested in extending their birding trip a little.

The walk will commence at 8am on Saturday, January 11th. The address of the reserve is 4399 Winter Lake Rd, Lakeland, FL 33803. Please reach out to me at 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. All photos on this page were taken on last year's trip to Circle B Bar.



Blue-headed Vireo



Purple Gallinule

A Weekend Birding in South Florida - January 24-26th

Most of you probably know that we are taking a weekend trip to the Miami area to bird with Klenisson Brenner, who is planning to show us many local birds that do not make it up to our area. We are anticipating seeing many exciting birds on this trip including the Red-masked Parakeet, Mitred Parakeet, Yellow-chevrons Parakeet, White-crowned Pigeon, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, White-tailed Kite, Tropical Kingbird and more. While the main trip is Saturday and Sunday, those arriving on Friday will have an opportunity to look for Short-eared Owl, Barn Owl and more on Friday evening.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Klenisson directly at klebrenner@gmail.com.



Scissor-tailed Flycatcher by Klenisson Brenner



Red-masked Parakeet by Klenisson Brenner

Pasco Audubon Birding by Bike

December 14th Birding by Bike Outing – Starkey Wilderness Park

Our December 2024 Pasco Audubon Birding by Bike outing was in Starkey Wilderness Park. Janet Shanks, Ken Landry, and I biked about 4 1/2 miles into the park and counted 28 different species of birds. The highlights of the day were Brown-headed Nuthatches, Bald Eagles, a Swamp Sparrow, and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet practicing his summer song.

Janet and I are both learning about the nuances of camera settings and lighting when taking photographs of birds with our new cameras, and we had a fun time photographing subjects with perfect weather and cooperative birds.



Juvenile Bald Eagle by Janet Shanks



Brown-headed Nuthatch by
Bob Burkard

Report: Christmas Bird Count - December 17, 2024

On December 17th, 50 birders in 21 teams and three boats set out to count all of the birds that could be found in our CBC circle over a 24 hour period. We had perfect weather and were able to locate 155 species (and maybe one more pending official review).

We used our usual West Pasco CBC format for the day, birding our team areas in the morning, some of us meeting up at Heartwood Preserve for the initial compilation and enjoying some pizza at lunch, then either going out on boats or scrambling around the area for missing species in the afternoon. Here are some of our highlights to give you a flavor of our day.

John and Vic Paalvast found 3 Snow Geese at Timber Oaks - a very rare find for Pasco County, not to mention our only American Wigeon for the day, and **Charlie Fisher** hiked out on the western trail at Eagle Point Park and discovered a pair of Western Kingbirds (later birders arriving at the site added a couple to that number) - the first Western Kingbirds ever discovered on a West Pasco CBC. Charlie was also the only one to see Northern Waterthrush on the day.

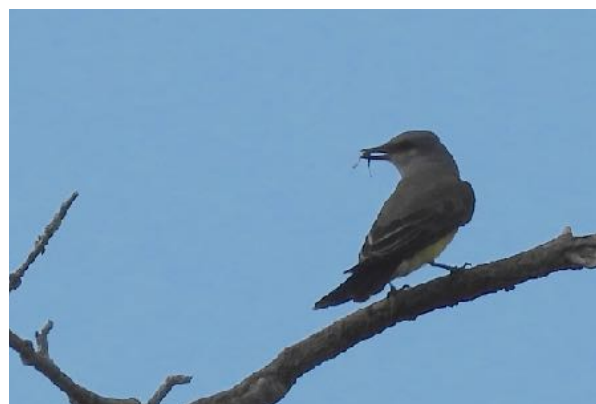
Joe Colantonio (the Starkey Gap Trail between SR 54 and Trinity Blvd.) and **Don Fraser with Chuck Bell and Ben Nickley** (Jay B. Starkey Wilderness Park) all saw Lincoln's Sparrows - also very rare visitors to us. Joe also found our only Song Sparrow of this year's count and then added Baltimore Orioles from his own backyard. Don's team were the only ones to report Chipping Sparrows!

Mary Keith, Mic McCarty and Cecilia Dumois were joined by **Tracy Muzyczka** of Florida DEP headed out into the salt marshes of Werner Boyce for a 10-mile excursion on an airboat in the afternoon and were delighted to find two Black Rails - very secretive birds that are extremely hard to find. They both saw and heard the birds - a rare occurrence indeed, and exciting news for all of us.

Pamela Graber, along with **Bill Kaempfer, Cuneyt Yilmatz and John Swenfurth** started the day out on the salt marshes at the north end of Werner-Boyce, and their finds included Northern Shoveler, Virginia Rail, White-throated and Seaside Sparrows. They were later joined by **Bob and Denise Lane** on a smaller craft to find birds off the coast. They found a lesser Black-backed Gull over Durney Key and Short-billed Dowitchers, and then headed out to Anclote Bar where they found upwards of 1000 birds resting, including 3 Snowy Plovers. We sadly learned later that the bar is technically out of our circle, so that those birds on the bar will not count towards our species total for the day, but still a fun experience for the team.



Snow Geese at Timber Oaks



Western Kingbird at Eagle Point Park

Bob and Denise also monitored high tide resting points along the coast from a private location and were able to add Whimbrel, American Oystercatchers and Bonaparte's Gull to our finds for the day - the only birders to see any of those species on the day.

Olivia Malice, Stefanie Herrera and Etienne Pracht had a wonderful start to their morning as they witnessed over 10,000 American Robins rising from the mangroves at Green Key (as observed from the Boy Scout Preserve). They also found our only Horned Grebes, Least Sandpipers and Merlin on the day.

Dave Bowman birded from Lake Dan at the southernmost tip of our circle, up the Pinellas Trail to Trinity Boulevard and found the first Red-headed Woodpecker spotted on our count in many years. He also picked up an Eastern Screech-Owl - a bird that is hard to find in Pasco these days. The only other one on the count was heard by Don Fraser and team deep in Starkey Park.

Bill Pranty and Mia Majetschak picked up a not-so-common Common Tern at Hudson Beach well out from the coast. Their scope made it possible to make the identification. They were also the only ones to see a Prairie Warbler on the day - picking it up at Green Key during our afternoon 'scrambling' session.

In the week prior to the count **Vince Capp** had spotted Marbled Godwits in the channel from Jennita Point in Hudson. Marbled Godwits are a tough bird to find in Pasco, even though they're more common for our neighbors in Pinellas County. Vince has worked out their foraging behaviors in the channel and was able to find one on the day of the count.

Bob Burkard and Christine Rowland started the day at the Cool Springs retention ponds where almost 300 Sandhill Cranes were roosting overnight, but also found the Long-billed Dowitchers that regularly winter there and 10 Green-winged Teal. Also spotted later at the marsh behind West Pasco Industrial Park was a Sharp-shinned Hawk and a Least Bittern.

Mike Kell, after a very successful roost count on the previous evening birded from home, and was the only birder to see Brown-headed Cowbirds on the day of the count - they came into his feeder.

Joanne and Rick Chamberlain birded the west entrance to the Anclote River Ranch Tract and Starkey Ranch Development. Some of their best finds on the day included Barred Owl, Marsh and Sedge Wrens, a Wilson's Snipe and, on going through her photos, Joanne found a Ruddy Duck (the only other ones we found by the Paalvast team at Timber Oaks).



Pamela Graber's team boat



Snowy Plover (the one that got away) by Bob Lane

Birding the lower southwest quadrant of our count circle, **Pat and Jeff Goldberg** found the only Monk and Nanday Parakeets of the count this year, and I believe the only sighting of a Great Horned Owl at Key Vista since Hurricane Milton.

Birding Brasher Park, Port Richey Waterfront Park and the marine education center (far south) entrance to Werner-Boyce, **Mike Ranck, Ken Landry and Bonnie Morgan** found our only Red-tailed Hawk on the day.

Peter, Catherine, Bradley and Kayley Day, Alice Jewell, Jo and Merl Hubbard birded central New Port Richey and Port Richey, finding 58 species including Lesser Scaup and Bufflehead. Also of note - Peter at 96 and Kayley at 31/2 were our oldest and youngest birders respectively!

Tom Crites and Tom St.Clair birded Longleaf, where Tom C. had been monitoring a juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron in the lead up to the count, and located it on the morning, then went to James E. Grey Park, where they patiently located a Hermit Thrush.

Frank and Mary Ellen Gotto walked three communities, but mostly Heritage Springs. They got their record species count ever and covered an impressive distance on foot, with Mary Ellen reporting over 14,000 steps for the morning.

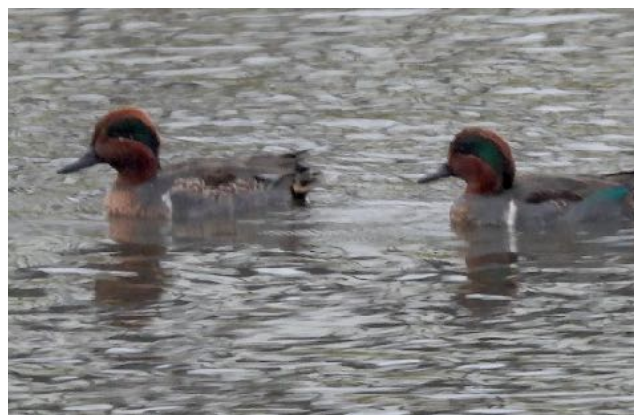
Seven Springs was surveyed via golf cart by **Ann and Dave King**, while **Susan Greenstein** handled the morning roost count.

Carrie and Darrell Sweredoski from upstate New York were visiting relatives in Zephyrhills and helped with our Jay B. Starkey Wilderness Park, and their finds on the day included Wood Duck, American Goldfinch and Eastern Towhee.

The Magic Dolphin went out around the coast in the afternoon with a group of 12 birders led by Mike Ranck. They were able to view 27 species including Red-breasted Mergansers, Dunlin, Black-bellied Plover, Ruddy Turnstone and Willet and Yellow-crowned Night Heron.

And our biggest misses on the day? Gadwall, Redhead, Eastern Whip-poor-will, American Woodcock, Black Skimmer, Sanderling, Peregrine Falcon, Bachman's Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Ovenbird and Painted Bunting.

Thanks to all of our dedicated birders for all of their hard work to make the event a big success!



Green-winged Teal at Cool Springs

Looking Ahead - February 2025 Events

- February 1 - 8am Bird Walk in Starkey Park
 11am - A Cat's Tale - with Craig Pittman (Story of the Florida Panther)
- February 8 - 8 am Field Trip to Weekiwachee Preserve, Hernando County
- February 8 8 am Birding by Bike - Pinellas Trail - Meet at Brooker Creek
- February 8 - 11am Photography Workshop - session 5
- February 16-23 Costa Rica - Introduction to Neotropical Birding - Group 1

Pasco Audubon Board of Directors

Christine Rowland, President - president@pascoaudubon.com

Mike Kell, VP for Education - jmike65@gmail.com

Don Fraser, VP for Conservation - dmfraser31@gmail.com

Joanne Chamberlain, Interim Treasurer - rijoraja@aol.com

Peter Day, Secretary* - pird@mac.com

Patricia Goldberg, Special Projects projects@westpascoaudubon.com

JoAnn Sinatra, At-Large

Ken Landry, At-Large

Kimberly Snaric, At-Large**

Stasi Gerges, Student Advisor*

Other Important Contacts:

Fran Sigurdson, Membership Chair fsigurds@gmail.com

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

* Outgoing ** Incoming