



# March 2026 Newsletter

## PASCO AUDUBON

### Upcoming Events

**Saturday, March 7th**  
**8am Bird walk in Jay B.**  
**Starkey Wilderness Park.**  
**Meet in the Education**  
**Center parking lot - p 1**

**11 am Feature Presentation:**  
**Tampa Bay Watch with Tara**  
**Kok p1**

**March 7- 16 - Colombia:**  
**Birding the Central Andes p3**

**Sunday, March 15th**  
**Birding-by-Bike in Starkey**  
**Wilderness Park p2**

**Friday & Saturday, March**  
**20-21: Welcome Back**  
**Songbirds Festival at**  
**Chinsegut p3**

**Saturday, March 28th**  
**Field Trip to Felts Audubon**  
**Preserve & Courtney**  
**Campbell Causeway- p3**

**March 28th - Photography**  
**Club Trip to Anclote Gulf**  
**Park and Pier p2**



### Feature Presentation: Tampa Bay Watch with Tara Kok

On March 7th we are happy to welcome Tara Kok, the Native Plant Program Manager at Tampa Bay Watch, as our featured speaker. Tampa Bay Watch is a local nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting and restoring the Tampa Bay Estuary and watershed through scientific and educational programs. Tara oversees the Native Planting Program, including Bay Grasses in Classes (BGIC) and the Community Wetland Nursery Program, which engages students and community members of all ages in hands-on restoration of degraded wetland habitats throughout the Tampa Bay watershed.

Tara’s presentation will highlight the mission and work of Tampa Bay Watch, the Native Planting Program, and the vital role wetland plants play in the health and resilience of Tampa Bay’s ecosystems. We hope that you are able to join us to learn more about this important topic.

As always, we’ll have a bird walk before the presentation, and all are welcome. Meet Joe Colantonio in the Education Center parking lot for an 8am start. Early migrants are arriving in our area, and Swallow-tailed Kites and Northern Parulas are a distinct possibility!

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

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Our March Birding-by-Bike outing will be in Jay B. Starkey Wilderness Park. We will meet at the Education Center at 8:00 am and bike back into the park. This is a great time of year for this bike ride, and I hope you join us. Reports on eBird show 42 different species of birds observed over the last 30 days

Please email me at [robertburkard9@gmail.com](mailto:robertburkard9@gmail.com) or text me at 610-256-7781 to let me know if you will be joining me.



American Robin by Bob Burkard

## Photography Club: Updates and Field Trip to Anclote Gulf Park by Noriko Buckles

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The Pasco Audubon Photography Club had our February meeting at the New Port Richey Library attended by members and guests. Topics included the upcoming "The Nature and Wildlife of Tampa Bay Photography Competition", which included our guest speaker Christine Rowland talking about the Conservation photography category. Members who went to the John Chesnut Sr Park outing in January submitted three photographs each to share with the attendees. The next March outing will be on the 28th to the Anclote Gulf Park and pier. Please contact Noriko at [Nbucklesphoto@gmail.com](mailto:Nbucklesphoto@gmail.com) if you would like to attend and for more information.



Osprey by Noriko Buckles

## Colombia: Birding The Central Andes from March 7-16 Christine Rowland

This month sees the first of our two international birding trips for Pasco Audubon this year. A group of us are setting out on an exciting birding adventure organized by Holbrook Travel. The central Andes, also known as the Zona Cafetera, is known for coffee growing, and increasingly for its incredibly diverse bird species. Most of us will be bringing our cameras along, and look forward to sharing our experiences with you on our return, so watch this space!

### March 21st & 22nd: Welcome Back Songbirds Festival at Chinsegut

We had originally planned a field trip to Croom and Chinesgut for March 21<sup>st</sup>, but when Hernando Audubon announced that this would be their festival date, we decided that it made the most sense to support the event. I believe that this is a free event, with walks and talks, and it would make a great day (or days) out. Audubon Florida president, Julie Wraithmell, will be the keynote speaker on Friday evening.

Rather than printing out the schedule details here, I've copied the link to the schedule on Hernando Audubon's webpage as I'm sure that any last minute changes in schedule will be reflected there.

<https://www.hernandoaudubon.org/field-trips-events/event-three-xd6bc-17sj7-hk38w-pztcw>

**Save The Date!**  
**March 20 – 21, 2026**

**Welcome  
Back  
Songbirds  
Festival**



**Join us as we celebrate spring songbird migration with our  
Welcome Back Songbirds Festival at Chinsegut Conservation Center!**

This collaborative, family-friendly festival will feature bird walks, engaging talks, hands-on workshops, fun activities for kids, and art for all ages. We're honored to host Julie Wraithmell, Executive Director of Audubon Florida, who will deliver our keynote address on Friday, March 20 at 6:30 pm. This event is proudly sponsored by Citrus County Audubon, Hernando Audubon, Chinsegut Conservation Center and the Florida's Adventure Coast Visitors Bureau. More details coming soon. Mark your calendar and plan to join us!

## March 28<sup>th</sup>: Field Trip to Felts Audubon Preserve via Courtney Campbell Causeway

Back by special request after several years of absence, this will be a two-stop birding experience. We'll begin our trip with a stop on Courtney Campbell Causeway, where we'll hope to find gulls, terns and shorebirds. We'll then continue on to Felts Audubon Preserve, a small preserve owned and managed by Manatee Audubon, and known for its buntings. It has a bird blind and trails. As the logistics for this trip are a little involved, I'm requesting that you register for it by emailing me at [president@pascoaudubon.com](mailto:president@pascoaudubon.com). I'll send details of each meet-up to all registered participants a few days before the day.



Black Skimmers by Christine Rowland

## Panhandle Weekend - January 30-February 1

Fifteen intrepid Pasco Audubon birders set out for a Panhandle weekend on what was likely the coldest weekend of the year. But thanks to great planning by our former Secretary, Kimberly Snaric, and our guide, Juli DeGrummond, as well as some shrewd packing, we all had a great time.

Our birders made various decisions on how much time to spend on the weekend, some arriving early enough to bird a full day on the Friday, while most began at 3pm. Highlights on Friday included Canvasback, White-faced Ibis (both at Rhoden Cove Landing), Western Tanager (private residence by arrangement) and finally a brief visit to Faulk Drive Landing – a premier hotspot in Leon County.

On Saturday the cold was beginning to set in, with sub-zero temperatures, but we had a full day planned at St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. We made several stops through the refuge, with some great sightings along the way – Gadwall, American Wigeon and Horned Grebe among them, as the wind picked up and temperatures continued to drop. At one point we took a lengthy hike out along a berm to find a Groove-billed Ani and a pair of female Vermilion Flycatchers, with a couple of bonus birds, American Bittern and Sora, thrown in for good measure.



Western Tanager by Patricia Goldberg



River Otter by Patricia Goldberg



Bonaparte's Gull by Patricia Goldberg

After a good lunch and a chance to warm up in a local café, we returned to St. Marks, this time heading for the lighthouse. We took a group photo as we were buffeted by the wind, and caught sight of a Clapper Rail, and gulls including a Bonaparte's, and tried to ID the shorebirds that were huddled in the Lighthouse pool. We put an official end to the day here, with the frigid temps beginning to get the better of us, although a few of us made additional unscheduled stops as we made our way back through this wonderful refuge. Most of us met up later for a hearty Mexican meal.

On Sunday morning the temperature, if my memory serves me correctly, was down to a bone-chilling and windy 20F. While a couple of people had set off home, most of us were up for the Sunday morning itinerary where we were to start at Bald Point State Park. Unfortunately it seemed that the weather got the better of the birds here, and there was little to see. So on we went to Apalachicola, a bit further along the coast, where our guide Juli had arranged for us to visit the feeders at a home hosting a rare Buff-bellied Hummingbird – the only one currently in the State of Florida. By this time it just didn't feel nearly as cold and we were happy to all be able to see not just this large and loud hummingbird, but also a Black-chinned Hummingbird and a Baltimore Oriole.

For most, this represented a fitting ending to the trip, but four of us continued with Juli to one more stop in hopes of finding a recently documented Couch's Kingbird. While we didn't find it, we had distant sightings of a couple of Western Kingbirds and a couple of Song Sparrows, and with that our trip concluded. Next year we should probably try a more southerly (and hopefully warmer) destination.



Photo op at the St. Mark's Lighthouse



Buff-bellied Hummingbird by Noriko Buckles



Buff-bellied Hummingbird by Patricia Goldberg



American Pipit by Patricia Goldberg

## February 14th - Birding-by-Bike Outing on The Good Neighbor Trail in Brooksville

Seven of us met at the start of the Good Neighbor trail in Brooksville and traveled the over 14 mile round trip to the Croom Wildlife Management Area and back. This was an amazing ride through different habitats, including woods, open fields, wood edges and farmland. The weather was perfect for a bike ride and we observed 35 different species of birds, with my favorites including a Red-tailed Hawk, a Cooper's Hawk, many Eastern Bluebirds, and Cedar Waxwings,



Red-tailed Hawk by Phil Duncan



American Kestrel by Carlos Zubilaga



White-crowned Sparrow by Anthony Marella



Swallow-tailed Kite by Anthony Marella

## Report: Field Trip to Paynes Prairie on February 21<sup>st</sup>

Ten of us participated in this field trip, with 8 of us heading up to Gainesville early and getting a jump-start on our birding with a late afternoon walk out on the Bolen-Bluff Trail to an observation tower over the prairie. Sightings included the bison and wild horses for which the prairie is famous, and also a number of distant Northern Harriers.

Our main event on Saturday was a visit to Sweetwater Wetlands. We began with a quick sighting of a Cooper's Hawk and a group of White-crowned Sparrows. We went on to see a wide range of birds including a Sora, Purple Gallinule, Marsh Wrens and Common Yellowthroats. We also had good looks at a couple of Song Sparrows. As we walked the berms we saw many Purple Martins, but also an early Barn Swallow. Just as we were preparing to leave and move on, we caught sight of the first Swallow-tailed Kites of the season – a wonderful way to end our Sweetwater visit.

Our final stop was LaChua Trail. Here we were a little taken aback by how dry everything was. On our visit a couple of years ago it had plenty of water with Snail Kites that were close enough for good study and photographs. This year the drought has left little water. And the lack of water has left a huge number of alligators laying in the mud. It was quite a sight.

Across the locations we saw around 70 species (there was some variation between us). You can see our well-illustrated Sweetwater list here at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S302719244>.

Anthony captured this Greater Yellowlegs fearlessly foraging in front of basking alligators.



## The Bluebird Project Update: Volunteers Needed by Bob Burkard

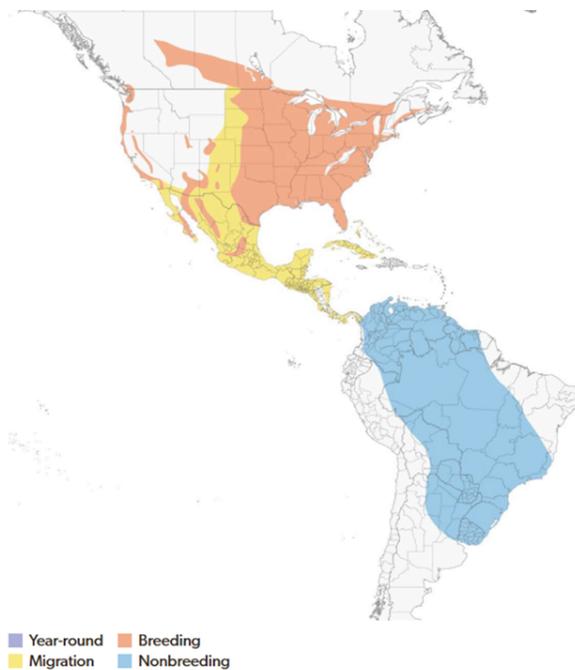
Our Bluebird Project members have been very busy over the last month. We replaced the three bluebird nesting boxes and poles at Aripeka Sandhills Preserve, three bluebird nesting boxes and poles at Veterans Memorial Park, and the two Eastern Bluebird nesting boxes at the Seven Springs Golf Course.

Helping our Eastern Bluebirds is an amazing and rewarding experience and our volunteers make a real difference to the local bluebird populations. We are looking for volunteers to help with our bluebird nesting box monitoring and maintenance. Please contact Bob Burkard at [robertburkard@gmail.com](mailto:robertburkard@gmail.com) if you would like to volunteer or further explore the activities of this Pasco Audubon conservation project.

## Pasco Audubon Purple Martin Conservation Update

Purple Martins, our largest swallows, are native songbirds that spend their winters in South America and migrate back to North America every year to breed. East of the Rocky Mountains they nest exclusively in human provided housing. Due to this total dependence on human provided houses or gourds, as well as habitat loss and competition from non-native European Starlings and House Sparrows, their population has dramatically declined. Pasco Audubon has started a Purple Martin Conservation Project to help reverse this population decline.

As discussed in last month’s newsletter, Pasco Audubon members have built and installed a Purple Martin house at WH Jack Mitchell Park off Little Road. We are now waiting for migrating Purple Martins to take up residence.



Purple Martins are categorized by age into ASY (After-Second-Year) adults and SY (Second-Year) subadults. They have different plumages: ASY males are completely glossy black-purple, while SY males having mottled, splotchy purple feathers on their chest and throat.

Purple Martins start to arrive in Florida as early as mid-January to early February, with arrivals lasting through May. The first Purple Martins to arrive in our area in mid-January are the older ASY “scouts” that are in a hurry to claim their nesting cavities. They usually go to the houses or gourds where they successfully nested in the previous year. So, unless their nesting failed or their house or gourd from last year is not available, it would be unlikely, but not unheard of, for one of these early arrivals to select our new Purple Martin house.

Our “target” Purple Martins are the SY Subadults. They usually start arriving in our area in mid-February. However, since Purple Martins mostly eat flying insects, including dragonflies, beetles, and moths, our cold weather has made it very tough on them and has slowed down their northward migration.

The Purple Martin Conservation Association maintains a Scout Arrival page on their website. It is updated by Purple Martin landlords who report arrivals : <https://www.purplemartin.org/research/8/scout-arrival-study> As of February 24<sup>th</sup>, **816** ASY scouts and **1** SY Subadult scouts have been reported in Florida. This website is a great source of information for Purple Martins.

So, keep your fingers crossed that we get some SY Subadult scouts. We will keep you posted.

## Winter Shorebird Survey 2026 by Christine Rowland

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The annual WSS took place this year from February 6<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup>. While five locations were surveyed during the period, two are much larger than the others. Thanks to Pamela Graber and Gillian Lankshear, who joined me in surveying Fred Howard Park on February 9<sup>th</sup>. You can see our list for the morning at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S299159747>. While we were there we spotted three birds with bands, which we reported and received information on, and saw three different ‘focal species’ of the count – Black Skimmers, American Oystercatchers and a Red Knot. Thanks also to Joe Colantonio, who joined me in surveying SunWest Park, where we saw a banded Royal Tern and another focal species – Wilson’s Plover. Our list can be viewed at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S298494626>. The remaining Pasco locations surveyed: Green Key Beach (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S299341137>), Hudson Beach (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S298937697>) and Key Vista (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S299730823>), had relatively few birds when surveyed during the period. I should note that while Hudson Beach proper had few of the birds we were hoping to see, a female Black Scoter was spotted off the point, and a pair of American Oystercatchers (focal species) were seen in the channel and added with the approval of survey organizers).



Best in Show 2025 by Phil Duncan

**The Nature and Wildlife of Tampa Bay  
Photography Competition, 2026**

Calling all nature photographers! Enter to 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 21<sup>st</sup>.**

**On April 11<sup>th</sup> @ 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 **Birding Brazil: from the Pampas to the Atlantic Forest**, presented by Klenisson Brenner.

**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](http://www.pascoaudubon.com)**

**for instructions on how to enter the competition and for event details.**

**Questions? Email Us At [PascoAudubonPhotos@gmail.com](mailto:PascoAudubonPhotos@gmail.com)**

## Audubon Membership

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### By Joanne Chamberlain and Fran Sigurdsson

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Interested in becoming a member of Pasco Audubon? Maybe you have attended an outing with us, or an educational meeting and you'd like to get more involved? If you love birds and want to join the organization that helps them, here is what you need to know.

By signing up through the Pasco Audubon chapter, you are actually joining National Audubon. What's more, our chapter will receive a portion of your initial membership fee. National Audubon requires a donation/membership of at least \$20 a year to be a member in good standing. Once you join initially, you will be added to National Audubon's roster and they will send you a welcome package and membership card. Members also receive the Audubon magazine with gorgeous pictures and informative articles.

After you join, your yearly renewals can be done on the [National Audubon website](#). You can send more than \$20 if you like, but only \$20 a year is required to receive membership benefits. Each year you will receive a new membership card and be entitled to Audubon magazine.

Of course, just to be clear, our Pasco chapter will gladly accept any separate donation you would like to give. 😊 Happy Birding!

### **New Memberships**

You can join the National Audubon Society via our local chapter through our webpage. You'll find the form at <https://pascoaudubon.com/join.html>.

### **Renewals**

Membership renewal takes place directly through National Audubon. This link will take you to the correct page <https://act.audubon.org/a/renew>.

### **Donations**

Donations can be made through our website via Paypal at <https://pascoaudubon.com/Donations.html>

### **Questions**

Questions about membership can be directed to Fran Sigurdson, Membership Chair at [fsigurds@gmail.com](mailto:fsigurds@gmail.com).

Questions about donations or membership funds can be addressed to Joanne Chamberlain, Treasurer, at [treasurer@pascoaudubon.com](mailto:treasurer@pascoaudubon.com).



## ECUADOR



### Birding the Chocó-Andes Region

with Pasco Audubon

February 7-16, 2027

Join Pasco Audubon on this epic birding tour. An extraordinary abundance of bird life inhabits the forests of northwestern Ecuador. Amid cloud forest, rainforest, páramo, and the eastern and western slopes of the Andes Mountains, you'll seek out as many of the country's 1,640-plus species as possible with assistance from your local expert guide on this 10-day adventure. In particular, much of the avifauna you'll encounter is endemic to the Chocó region, while other species are more easily found here than any place else.

Photo: Andean Emerald, just one of more than 40 hummingbird species likely to be seen on this trip!

#### Program Highlights

- Explore the Chocó ecoregion across a variety of protected areas, including Alambi Cloud Forest Reserve, Milpe Bird Sanctuary, Antisana Ecological Reserve, Rio Silanche, and others.
- Visit the famed Refugio Paz de las Aves, known as a haven for antpittas and Andean Cocks-of-the-rock.
- Take in Yanacocha Biological Reserve, a protected area established to safeguard the critically endangered and endemic Black-breasted Puffleg, the official emblematic bird of Quito.
- Bird the Mashpi-Amagusa Reserve for target species like the Rose-faced Parrot, Orange-breasted Fruiteater, Chocó Vireo, Moss-backed Tanager, and Indigo Flowerpiercer.

#### Enrollment Begins Soon!

\$3,950 per person 8 participants or \$3,695 per person 10 participants

All-inclusive except international airfare to and from Ecuador, gratuities for guide and driver and expenses of a personal nature.

## Looking Ahead to March...

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April 11th - 8am - Monthly walk in Starkey Park

11am - SEASON FINALE Birding Brazil: From the Pampas to the Atlantic Forest with Klenisson Brenner AND The 2026 Nature and Wildlife of Tampa Bay Photography Competition Annual Awards

April 12th - Field Trip: Birding Migration at Fort De Soto

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

April 16-27- International Trip: Birding Southern Costa Rica

## Pasco Audubon Board of Directors

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Christine Rowland, President - [president@pascoaudubon.com](mailto:president@pascoaudubon.com)

Don Fraser, Vice President and Conservation Chair - [dmfraser31@gmail.com](mailto:dmfraser31@gmail.com)

Joanne Chamberlain, Treasurer - [treasurer@pascoaudubon.com](mailto:treasurer@pascoaudubon.com)

Phil Duncan, Secretary - [pascoaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:pascoaudubon@gmail.com)

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JoAnn Sinatra, At-Large

Ken Landry, At-Large

Bob Burkard - Birding-by-Bike, Bluebird Project & Purple Martin Project [robertburkard@gmail.com](mailto:robertburkard@gmail.com)

### Other Important Contacts:

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Noriko Buckles, Pasco Audubon Photography Club Coordinator [nbucklesphoto@gmail.com](mailto:nbucklesphoto@gmail.com)

Our web address is:

[www.pascoaudubon.com](http://www.pascoaudubon.com)

Our Facebook Page is:

**Pasco Audubon**

Share interesting sightings via Facebook on

**Pasco Audubon Bird Board**