



May 2025 Newsletter

PASCO AUDUBON

Formerly known as West Pasco Audubon

Upcoming Events

Saturday, May 3rd

Bird walk in Jay B. Starkey Wilderness Park. Meet at 7:30am in the Education Center parking lot.

Saturday, May 10th

8am Birding by Bike at Chassahowitzka - details p. 2

Saturday, May 24th

7:30 am Field Trip through East Pasco - p. 1



Blue Grosbeak by Christine Rowland

Coming in May

With our educational programs for the 2024-25 season drawing to a close with our April 5th meeting, we are moving to a much quieter pace for May. Still - we have a few events for those who enjoy participating even when the weather is warmer.

This Saturday, May 3rd, we will have our usual 'first Saturday of the month' walk in Jay B. Starkey Wilderness Park. Meet up in the Education Center parking lot at 7:30 if you'd like to join us (please note the earlier 'summer' schedule of 7:30 rather than 8am). Then on May 10th will be our monthly Birding by Bike adventure - see p. 2 for details.

Also, we'll do our annual trip through East Pasco on May 24th. We'll meet in the McDonald's parking lot at 31038 Cortez Blvd, Brooksville, FL 34602 ready to depart at 7:30am. From here our route will take us along Kettering Road, Powerline Road, and several other stops (to be determined based on scouting). The early part of our route has seen some significant development over the past year or so, but we still hope to see Purple Martins, Red-headed Woodpeckers, Blue Grosbeak, Eastern Meadowlark, Summer Tanagers, Swallow-tailed Kites and if we are very lucky, Mississippi Kites. This trip is largely by car, hopping out at intervals to see birds. Please let me know at president@pascoaudubon.com if you plan to attend.



WISHING YOU ALL A
WONDERFUL SUMMER!

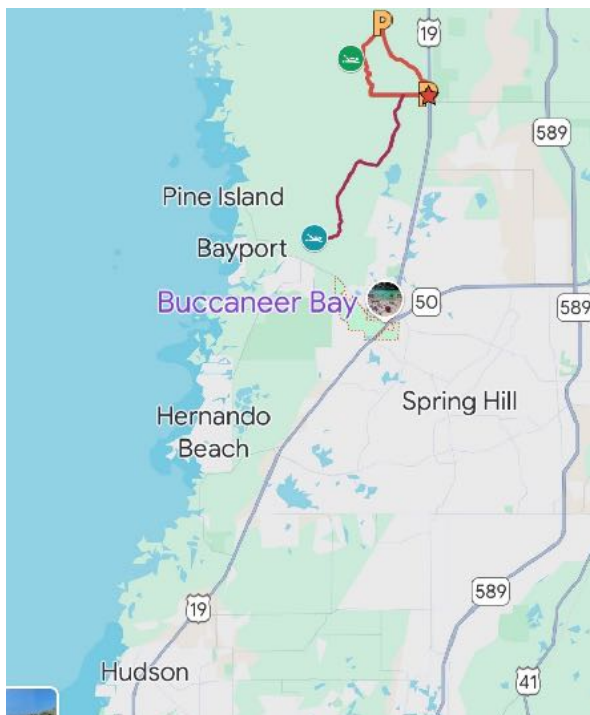
May 10th Birding by Bike – at Chassahowitzka WMA with Bob Burkard

For our May 10th Pasco Audubon Birding by Bike outing, we are revisiting the Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area, which is located 15 miles south of Crystal River.

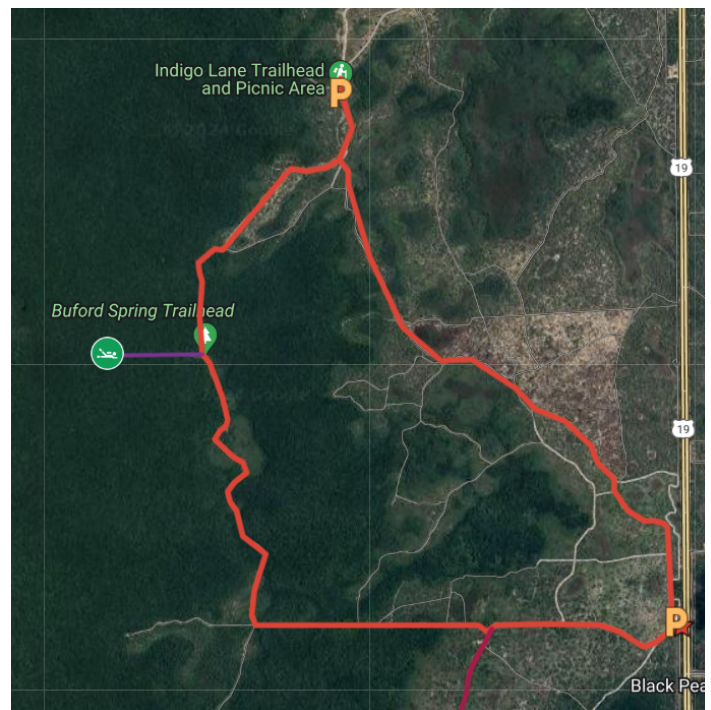
This is a pleasant 7-mile ride on a hard-packed trail where May is a good time to see Red-headed Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers, and migrating warblers. eBird reported sightings of Yellow-billed and Black-billed Cuckoos last May.

This website is a good source of information on biking in the Chassahowitzka Wilderness Management Area: <https://www.100floridatrails.com/eco-biking/chassahowitzkawma.htm#section1>

We will meet at 8:00 AM at the parking area of the Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area 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.



Trip Location



7-mile trail route through the park

October 4: Our Pasco Audubon Bluebird Project and How to be a Successful Bluebird Landlord in your own Backyard

In our opening presentation of the 25-26 season, Bob Burkard will discuss what led to the decline in the Eastern Bluebird population and how conservationists and citizens birders, including efforts like our Pasco Audubon Bluebird Project, have saved this amazing bird species.

We will also share information on our Pasco Audubon Bluebird Project's history and its remarkable results, and include instructions on how you can become a Bluebird Landlord in your own backyard. Helping the "Bluebird of Happiness" by providing safe nesting and natural food sources that can have a significant result on the Eastern Bluebird population in your area.

**Florida Scrub Jays****by Christine Rowland**

Report: Field Trip to Ocala National Forest

We often think of this trip as the Florida Scrub Jay trip, as it is one place where it seems that Florida Scrub Jays can reliably be located. As Florida's only endemic species, it is a special bird for many of us, and is struggling to survive in the face of habitat loss and fragmentation. According to a recent report by Audubon Florida, Ocala National Forest holds by far the largest number of scrub jay families in our state.

There were 10 of us on this trip, and we convoyed from location to location. Our leader for the trip, Mike Ranck, knows where there are several family groups of jays, and was able to take us directly to a family group at our first location. Florida Scrub Jays are curious birds, and they are often interested to come out and see what's going on, and that definitely happened with this first family. They popped up on snags, and a couple of times they hopped down onto logs and onto the grass, providing better views. For at least 4 of our number (Janet, Sharon, Dave and Phil), these were lifer birds, and it was very fortunate that we were able to get such good looks. This first location definitely proved to have the best views of the morning. We did go on and see many other species - the group hanging in there throughout found 41 species, although we did not all stay for that long. Other species seen included Northern Flicker, American Kestrel, Eastern Towhee, and Blue-headed Vireo.

While we found notably fewer scrub jays than on visits in other recent years (9, versus 14 on our last visit and 20 the time before), we did get some lovely looks. Its impossible to do justice to them in the photos with this article, but if you link to Pamela Graber's eBird report (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S22I651848>) for the day (she stayed until the end and saw the most species) you will be able to see a large selection of the photographs taken of them that morning.

Thanks to Mike for a great trip



Phil Duncan receiving Best in Show from Jay Walters



Paige Ely receives The People's Choice Award from Jay Walters

April Meeting and Photography Competition

Our final meeting of the season celebrated the winners of this year's photography competition after sharing our photography from our Costa Rica trip. We had our largest turnout of the year for the event.

Before beginning our meeting **Hal Sigurdson**, our competition coordinator, thanked our sponsors on behalf of Pasco Audubon. This year's sponsors were **Pasco Fine Arts Council, Pasco Camera Exchange (Jim and Annette Smetzer), Cary Street Partners (Jay Walters and Steven Cere), CPR Tampa (Kimberly and Jay Snaric), and Mike and Laurie Kell**. Thank you sponsors - you help to make all of our conservation efforts happen!

We would also be remiss not to mention our hard working judges, who each evaluated all 74 entries in order to come up with our winners. They are professional photographer and instructor **John Stalter, John Middleton**, and artist **Janet Litzel**. The Starkey Park Award was selected from among qualifying entries by **Joanne Clement**, and our own **Patricia Goldberg** judged the Conservation Award. Thank you judges! Friends and family voted for 'The People's Choice'. We also reminded everyone that each photographer may only win one judged award - the highest for which they qualify.

Jay Walters of Cary Street Partners was on hand to present awards, as were **Mike and Laurie Kell**. This year's photographs, with awards noted, can be viewed at https://pascoaudubon.com/Contest2025/2025_contest_entries.html.

The Conservation Award was won by **Rachele Katz** for "That's Not Food". The Starkey Park Award winner was **Doreen Damm** with "Heron Atop a Cypress on Grassy Lake". And the People's Choice Award was won by **Paige Ely** for "Watchful Eye".



**Noriko Buckles - First Place, Nature
Pasco Audubon**



Ron Buening - First Place, Birds



Rachele Katz received The Conservation Award from sponsors Mike and Laurie Kell



Doreen Damm receives the Starkey Park Award from Hal Sigurdson, Competition Coordinator

In the Nature category, the winner was **Noriko Buckles** with “Sunset at Anclote Lighthouse”, second place went to **Alexis Madrid** for “Pollinator Paradise”, third place to **Gail Norwood** for “Who, Me?” and honorable mentions to **Paige Ely** for “Woven Dew”, **Anthony Marella** for “Might You Spare a Ham Sandwich?”, and **Christine Rowland** for “Looking Innocent”.

In the Birds category the winner was **Ron Buening II** with “Boldly Black and White”, second place went to **Sharon Cline** for “Palm Warbler Amongst Oak Flowers” and third place to **Roy Lockwood** for “Pipefish Hoping for a Truce”. Honorable mentions went to **Noriko Buckles** for “Piercing”, **Joanne Chamberlain** for “Stay Away From My Girl” and to **Kimberly Snaric** for “I Think I can”.

And finally, the Best in Show award went to **Phil Duncan** for “Black Skimmer”.

All of us at Pasco Audubon with like to send our heartfelt appreciation to **Hal Sigurdson**, who worked incredibly hard throughout to make this year’s event a great success. It was a lot of work, coordinating work with our judges, organizing ribbons and certificates. And thanks also to Mike Kell for ensuring that all of the entries were displayed on our website gallery.



Mike and Laurie Kell

Report: Birding-by-Bike along the Pinellas Trail, April 12, 2025

by Bob Burkard



Red-headed Woodpecker on The Pinellas Trail



Photos by Bob Burkard

Our April Birding-by-Bike adventure began at Brooker Creek Preserve and biking north up the Pinellas Trail. The weather was perfect, and the company was great. Our group included visitors from northern California and Ohio.

We observed 39 species of birds and the biggest surprise of the day was observing a pair of Red-headed Woodpeckers that appear to be nesting in a large dead tree about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile north of Keystone Road.

We also saw Barn Swallows and Northern Rough-winged Swallows feeding in the open areas, along with a late Savannah Sparrow and a pair of American Kestrels.



Our Group



Sandhill Crane

Pasco Audubon's Birdathon Team Raises \$1000 for Avian Charities by Pamela Graber



Left: Short-billed Dowitchers and Right: Black-bellied Plover - both taken by Pamela Graber

On April 16 the Pasco Plovers (Pamela Graber, Patricia Goldberg, Kimberly Snaric, and Christine Rowland) raised \$901 for conservation from 36 sponsors while identifying 105 species of birds within 24 hours of birding. Charities supported were Seaside Seabird Sanctuary and Audubon Florida's Coastal Island Sanctuaries.

We thought it would be quite a challenge in this somewhat sparse migration season but we kept our team goal at again locating 100 species. Our search area was west Pasco but we removed SunWest Park from our visit list and inserted Fred Howard Park (in Pinellas) instead due to the habitat loss and restricted access at SunWest due to construction.

So it was somewhat to our surprise that we succeeded in locating 105 species in 13 hours of birding. We starting at 6 a.m. at Starkey Park and made a total of 15 stops along the way!

Our first stop gave us a boost as we noted not only Chuck-will's-widows calling but also heard the Common Nighthawks making their "peent" sound as they zoomed across the open fields at the park entrance. We had missed these last year.

At Robert K Rees a Reddish Egret, White-winged Doves, and Prairie Warblers made timely appearances while Clapper Rails called in the background. Two birds we photographed on the wires as we were leaving turned out to be Western Kingbirds which were one of the biggest surprises of the day.

At Double Hammock Creek the best surprise was the good looks most had at a Veery as well as good photos of our first Summer Tanager of the day.

Brasher Park then yielded the Yellow-crowned Night Heron but there was also a calling Grey Kingbird which was an FOS (first of the season) for many of us. And a Great Horned Owl at the Werner-Boyce Park office area was the icing on the cake for that location.

Timber Oaks did not disappoint us with lots of shorebirds seen including Dunlin, Least Sandpiper, and 9 species of wading birds plus Blue-winged Teal.



Hooded Warbler by Christine Rowland



Summer Tanager by Christine Rowland

We also had a good species count at Cool Springs, which included Long-billed Dowitchers and both yellowlegs, and a surprisingly large number of Least Sandpipers. The newly mowed field did not yield an Eastern Meadowlark, however.

By 1 p.m. our species count was 86 and we were en route to Fred Howard along Trinity Rd when an American Kestrel and a Swallow-tailed Kite were added to the list.

Fred Howard Park, which took the place of SuWest on last year's list, provided us good looks at Short-billed Dowitchers plus Semipalmated and Black-bellied Plovers. We had the added delight of Hooded Warbler, Indigo Bunting, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo in the playground oaks area.

We then came back into Pasco and stopped at Joe Colantonio's house where an Orchard Oriole along with House Finch and House Sparrows filled out our list.

The Pasco Plovers ended their day at the Seven Springs Golf Course roost with a Limpkin as a final find. The baby egrets and anhingas, as well as so many stork babies there, were really something to see. I personally was shocked that my usual night-herons and spoonbills could not show themselves to my team to enrich our list.

One thing we did prove was that there is still an amazing diversity of species in just our local area in spite of the areas of habitat and storm destruction. And our Pasco Plovers managed to bird hard, have fun, and raise funds in aid of two good causes. You can believe we all slept very well after that!



Greater (left) and Lesser (right) Yellowlegs at Cool Springs



Cape May Warbler by Christine Rowland



Bobolink by Anthony Marella

Field Trip Report: Fort De Soto Park April 27th, 2025 by Christine Rowland

On Sunday, April 27, 14 of us met up at Fort De Soto to look for migrating birds. It has been a slow migration for our area this year, and we saw far fewer birds than we have done in many previous seasons. It seems that both numbers of migrating birds and number of species are down. There was a notable absence of thrushes. Still, we definitely made the most of our time there and saw some colorful migrants.

At East Beach, our starting point we saw the first of our Cape May Warblers, a couple of Blackpoll Warblers and a male Black-throated Blue Warbler.

After looking around for the best part of an hour, we headed over to the ranger's house (at Bay Pier) where we were able to see many Cape May and Blackpoll Warblers, and where a few of us caught a glimpse of an Ovenbird. But Joe had seen Bobolink in the flagpole area as we passed it, and we backtracked a tad to try to re-sight it. And sure enough, there it was (see photo). This was a lifer for some in our group and we were all very glad to see it and to be able to photograph it as it foraged in the grasses. If only birding were always this easy!

Then on to North Beach, where we were able to observe the nesting Gray Kingbirds, which was a treat. We heard Prairie Warblers in the mangroves and saw some of the same warblers we had been seeing throughout the park.

Rather sadly for us, the tide was high, which limited our ability to walk out onto Outback Key to view shorebirds, and the beachgoers were numerous. Still, we did see a pair of Reddish Egrets, a lot of terns and some rather wonderful Magnificent Frigatebirds.

After a picnic lunch we finished it off with views of a pair of Great Crested Flycatchers and finally, Josh spotted a Common Yellowthroat before we each went our own ways. You can view our trip report and photos at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S230142915>.

International Birding Travel by Christine Rowland



Resplendent Quetzal by Noriko Buckles

February and March 2025 saw us send 2 groups of birders to Costa Rica for Holbrook Travel's Introduction to Neotropical Birding. Each group had an amazing experience, and it would take far too long to attempt to detail those trips here, but our first group made a trip report, which can be located at <https://ebird.org/tripreport/335264>. The trip report not only provides a list of species seen and photographs of the various birds we saw, but also includes on the left hand side a simple narrative account of the trip to give you a bit more of a flavor if you are interested.

Also, our slide show from our April 5th meeting is available on our webpage at https://pascoaudubon.com/Newsletters/Alright_AmigosSmall!.pdf. And as there is no narrative on the slide show, I'll just explain that the title Alright Amigos, came from our wonderful in-country guide, Jorge Monge, who would begin every address to us this way. And why the simple Clay-colored Thrush on the front slide rather than one of the more spectacular birds? It was Jorge's 'spark bird', having nested on his window ledge as a boy. To this day he always thinks of it as 'the most beautiful bird in Costa Rica'.

Before setting off for Costa Rica we had tentatively agreed to take the Colombia: Birding the Central Andes trip in 2026. But after visiting Costa Rica we also wanted to return again to see more of the country - especially if we could secure Jorge as our guide again. So, after everyone gave their input, we have two trips lined up for 2026. The Central Andes trip will be in March and the Southern Costa Rica trip in April. Both of these trips filled as soon as they opened.

The Bluebird Project Update: White Eggs or Blue? by Bob Burkard

The Pasco Audubon Bluebird project has gotten off to a great start this year. We have 25 active nests with 12 Eastern Bluebirds that have already fledged. Our project currently monitors 38 bluebird nesting boxes at 12 locations. The Bluebird Project page on the Pasco Audubon website provides a phenomenal amount of information for those of us who are interested in Eastern Bluebirds. I encourage all of you to check out this page at : <https://pascoaudubon.com/Bluebirds/BBIndex.html>.

Eastern Bluebird eggs are typically pale blue. However, a small percentage (4-5%) of bluebird females lay white eggs, and a female that lays white eggs will consistently lay white eggs. I have only seen this a few times in the years that I have been monitoring Eastern Bluebird nests. So, I was excited to see this in one of our bird nesting boxes at W.H. Jack Mitchell Jr. Park. These photos show just how dramatic the differences in color are.



White eggs in Mitchell Ranch box #2



Blue eggs in Mitchell Ranch box #1

The Eastern Bluebirds that hatch from white eggs grow up with the typical Bluebird colors. This photo shows the babies that hatched from the white eggs. You can see one of the eggs was not viable. Tufted Titmice and Carolina Chickadees are cavity-nesting birds that will use our nesting boxes, although we do not see this as commonplace as we do Eastern Bluebirds. This year we have a Tufted Titmouse nest in one of our boxes at Jay B. Starkey Wilderness Park, and four Carolina Chickadees fledged in a box at Aripeka Road Weeki Wachee Preserve.

To the right: Eastern Bluebird babies that hatched from white eggs. The remaining egg was not viable.





Celebrating Peter Day's Many Years of Board Service April 5, 2025

Pasco Audubon Board of Directors

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