



THE SCRUB JAY

A PUBLICATION BY MARION AUDUBON SOCIETY

Message from the President

It's been nearly two years already, so it's time to elect a new board. Our club is run by a handful of volunteers, and we need your help. If you are willing to contribute to keeping our club going, please contact me at marionaudubon@outlook.com. Our board meetings are held thru zoom 6-7 times a year and last about 45 minutes. We will vote to approve positions at our annual meeting on December 9th at Ocala Wetland Recharge Park before our birding tour. Board positions include: President, Vice-president, Secretary, Treasurer, Conservation Chair, Program Director, and Membership Chair. This is a 2-year commitment. I am happy to explain the responsibilities of each position to those who may be interested.

Upcoming Events and Programs

Find us on Facebook for news, Instagram for photos and on Meetup for events.

Book Swap!

December 9, 2023

Please bring all the birding and nature related books you can part with to the December 9th, meeting at Ocala Wetlands Recharge Park. Tables will be available to display them. A jar will be placed on the tables for optional donations to the Marion chapter treasury. Thanks, hope to see you there.

GAINESVILLE/ALACHUA COUNTY CLIMATE CHANGE SUMMIT

Keynote Speaker: → **JACQUELINE PATTERSON**
 Founder/Director of the Chisholm Legacy Foundation for Climate Justice.

This event includes lunch. It is free to attend but if you would like to help us cover expenses, you may do so when you register using the Ticket button.

CLICK HERE TO REGISTER

Save the Date:

Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 16, 2023.

Every year we participate in National Audubon's Christmas Bird Count.

We break into teams and take a census of the birds in our assigned circle. It's a great way to see birds, meet some new people and contribute to science. The data we collect is analyzed by Cornell to determine changes to bird populations and territory.

We need your help! If you would like to participate, contact us through our website by October to be placed on a team.

If anyone is available and interested in participating in The Emeralda Christmas Bird Count scheduled for December 28, please contact Gigi DelPizzo at [+1 \(352\) 406-1577](tel:+13524061577) or [+1 \(352\) 406-1577](tel:+13524061577). A portion of this count is in Marion County.

June challenge:

RESULTS are in! Congratulations to:

Tami Reece with a new record 115 (+2 non-ABA) species!

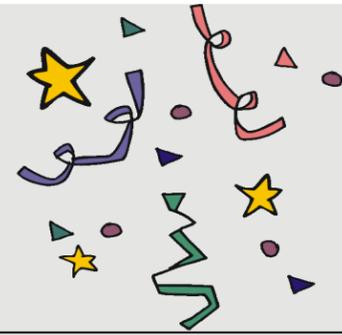
Runners up are Alice Horst with 106 (+3) and Scott Robinson with 104.

Fun facts about the contest:

128 species were recorded in June (includes 4 non-ABA birds)

86 species were reported on Day 1

15 birds were seen only once during the competition (noted with *) and we had some really good ones make an appearance, some of them are noted to the right with the finder listed. Our participation doubled. And only one county in Florida had more participants.



June Challenge:

- *Least tern Liz
- *Caspian tern Scott
- *American avocet Alice
- *Belted Kingfisher Michele, Tami, Alice
- *B&W Warbler Curtis Garth
- *King Rail Scott
- *Royal tern Liz, Steven, Darcy, Alice, Tami, Michele
- *Hairy woodpecker Tami
- *Lesser Scaup Steven & Darcy
- *Sandwich tern Tami, Liz, Michele
- Common Tern Alice
- Roseate Spoonbill multiple sightings
- Ring-necked duck (3 individuals in 2 locations) Alice & Michele
- American Coot (seen twice in 2 locations) Tim Hardin, Steven & Darcy
- *Pied-billed Grebe Alice
- *Ruddy Shelduck Liz
- *Helmeted Guineafowl Steven & Darcy
- *American Redstart Tami
- *Greater Yellowlegs Alice

See the full contest results here: <https://floridabirdingtrail.com/2023results/>

American Kestrel Monitoring for FWC

By Josie Muncy

In 2009, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) initiated a kestrel nest box monitoring program in north-central Florida to expand nesting opportunities for Southeastern American Kestrels. It is important to provide artificial cavities for these birds because much of their natural nesting habitat has been lost due to urbanization and changes in agricultural practices.

Although, an overall decline in kestrel abundance has occurred over the past 70 years, current population trends are unknown. By coordinating management and monitoring efforts throughout the state, FWC will be able to more accurately determine the bird's current population status and how kestrel abundance is changing over time in response to management efforts.

American Kestrel, also called a Sparrow Hawk, can fly at speeds up to 39MPH, they are the smallest and most common Falcon in North America. They eat mostly insects and rodents. Their clutch size ranges from 4-5 eggs, and 1 to 2 broods per year. Incubation time is 26-32 days and nesting from 28-31 days. Their nest boxes are mounted approximately 10-20 feet off the ground. The nest box size is roughly 14 in high x 13 in deep x 10 in wide.

Marion Audubon Society has partnered with Ocala Parks and Recreation, FWC and Ocala Wetland Recharge Park. The season usually starts in April and goes until July, with an occasional August visit. The criteria are making one visit per month, trying to keep a 30-day spacing. FWC provides the camera equipment, and we provide the pole that allows us to look inside the boxes.

There are five parks that we monitor. Big Sun has 2 boxes, Legacy has 1 box, Tuscawilla has 1 box, Ocala Wetland Recharge Park has 1 box and Ocala Regional Sportsplex has 2 boxes.

Our results differ each year, but for 2023 the following is what was seen;

On 4/3 Legacy had 5 eggs, on 5/2 saw 3 fledglings with female in the area and in June box was empty, so there were 5 successfully American Kestrels that took flight.

On 5/2 Ocala Wetland had an adult fly into the box, so that was the start of nesting. On 6/2 there were 4 eggs and 1 adult. On 7/3 female remained in box and only able to see 1 egg, on 8/1 the box was empty. This would be considered 4 successful fledglings.

On 6/2 Ocala Regional Sportsplex had 3 eggs, on 7/3 there were 3 fledglings and on 8/1 the box was empty. This was a success of 3 American Kestrels.

We are always looking for a few folks to assist in monitoring the boxes. We are limited to the quantity of folks at one time, no more than 3 folks, to not disturb the female nesting. Thanks to Tami Reese, who took over for me while I went north in June, and to our helpers Sallie and Rusty Crawford and Paul Jacobs with FWC and Gabriela Sullivan with Ocala Recharge Park.



Wading Bird Survey Update

We are looking for volunteers who may be interested in participating in the Wading Bird survey. This survey is being undertaken in conjunction with the FWC's Florida Wildlife Research Institute. Marion Audubon is one of 4 Audubon chapters who are participating in 2024 to work out any bugs in the reporting process before it is rolled out statewide. The survey will take place during nesting season - March through April or so - and we will need teams to count birds nesting in rookeries throughout the county.

Please contact Liz Stakenborg (estakenborg@gmail.com) if you are interested in participating in the project. Liz has volunteered to represent Marion Audubon for this project and will keep you posted on this very interesting project.



Good for another reminder-

Check out "Wings over Florida", make this a fun year to see how many species of Birds and/or butterflies you get.

You can get a certificate for the number of Birds or Butterflies species seen as well as your Big Year total. Although the time period runs from January 1st thru December 31st, there is no time like now to begin your list and plan for next year! Go to www.floridabirdingtrail.com to learn how to get certificates. These certificates start at 25 species, so you don't have to be a pro to get a certificate.

Miss a Program? Watch the replay on our You Tube channel.
Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/@marionaudubonsociety7195>

Popular programs include tutorials on ebird (keeping lists and finding new birds) and Merlin (for identifying birds), Photography by Leroy Simon, Big Year Birding, Patch Birding, Wildlife Rescue in Marion County and more.

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

We have 112 paid members for 2023.
Join or easily renew online thru our website:
: <https://marionaudubon.org/membership>



Want an official
MAS name tag?

We will be placing an
order soon.
Cost is \$6.00
Email
marionaudubon@outlook.com
To be added to the
list



Kent Weakley has been birding since 2021 after his son, Maxfield, inspired him on a photography trip to Nebraska. Kent is on pace to reach 500+ U.S. Life Birds and 650+ World Lifers by the end of this year. Kent is a graphic designer, professional photographer, artist, and woodworker, to name a few. He has operated Blue Sky Graphic Communication, Inc. since 1990 and teaches people worldwide how to turn wood bowls through his website, TurnAWoodBowl.com, and his similarly named YouTube channel. Kent set a Big Year record for Marion County in 2022, and he enjoys the data and statistics of listing almost as much as he enjoys seeing the birds. Besides adding to his county numbers, Kent enjoys the new thrill of traveling and adding birding to the agenda. "Traveling has taken on a whole new meaning now that I bird," he says. "To drop into a foreign environment and have completely different species to potentially see is super exciting." Kent has always loved to travel, but now he has more reason to plan ahead. "Birding, or rather just glimpsing into the life of birds, brings up so many questions, so many unanswerable questions. We are blessed to "see" birds when we get outside and bird. I wish everyone had the opportunity to bird every day. We would learn so much more, but most importantly, I think the world would be so much different if everyone had the level of awareness we do as birders," Kent added.

Liz Stakenborg began birding after retiring from her legal practice in Ocala in 2018. She had a very brief foray into real estate sales prior to COVID and then decided that she needed a hobby as her plans to travel were put on hold. Her sister, Ann, had started birding in their home state of Illinois and comes down as a snowbird to The Villages. She began doing weekly walks with the Brownwood Birders and suggested that Liz join a walk or two. It was so much fun, especially meeting so many people with similar interests, that she continued with the Brownwood Birders (where she is one of the co-presidents). She became a member of Marion Audubon after meeting Michele Reyes at a Big Day event. Michele has been an amazing mentor and friend and Liz has enjoyed serving on her Marion Audubon board as Conservation chair for the past two years. She was awarded a grant from the National Audubon Society and works with Audubon's Regional conservation committee. She also was instrumental in establishing The Villages/Lake Panasoffkee Christmas Bird Count which had its inaugural count in January of this year. Her favorite thing about birding is that it is a continuing treasure hunt to find and ID the birds. It is also fun to travel and continue to pursue the hobby everywhere at any time. It is also so fun to meet so many people who share the passion. Liz and Cor have been married for 41 years. They moved to Ocala from Kilbride, Canada where their two children were born. They love to travel and are lucky to have been able to travel extensively around the world over the years. Liz and Cor have a son and daughter and 5 amazing grandchildren.



Field Notes from our Club Members

Birding Arizona in Summer

by Kent Weakley

This past July, I wanted to find an attractive, a.k.a. "bird-rich" place to go for my birthday. My initial thoughts were New England or maybe the Pacific Northwest. As I did more research, everything pointed to Southeast Arizona. What? Arizona in summer? Yes, that's what I was thinking. Who in their right mind would want to go to the deserts of Arizona in summer? As it turns out, everything is relative. Arizona is an apparent respite from the heat south of the border for many migrating birds of Mexico. The "Sky Islands" are the summer travel destination for dozens of birds. Just north of the Mexican border, several mountain ranges pop out of the sweltering Arizona desert, forming the "Sky Islands." The mountain ecological and vegetation zones layered through these mountains attract numerous summer visitors. Many visiting birds can be seen nowhere else in the United States. And for the record, it was scorching in Arizona. But it's a "dry heat." Ha! It's a "lean-to-far-in-while-pulling-the-turkey-out-of-the-oven-on-Thanksgiving" kind of heat. Also, a couple of places we stayed had no AC. Yes, you read that correctly. It's usually cooler in the mountains, they say, and they were experiencing a drier-than-normal wet season. Sigh. Ask about AC when booking accommodations if this is important to you. When I began studying hotspots and looking up these species, my mind raced like a kid in a candy store. The Red-faced Warbler, Blue-throated Mountain-gem, Five-striped Sparrow, Lucifer and Calliope Hummingbirds, Varied Bunting, and the stunning Elegant Trogon all had my heart and mind spinning. Would I be able to find any of these? Which ones? What specifics do I need to know about these species and locations? For me, questioning and understanding is a big part of the fun of birding. The question becomes, can I solve this puzzle and find these birds? Birding is a game and a ton of fun on many levels. After researching and studying countless hotspots and seasonal lists, I formed a plan and a route. My wife and I would start in Tucson and target Mt. Lemmon, then head to Madeira Canyon, Patagonia State Park, and The Paton Center for Hummingbirds before heading east to Sierra Vista. We would bird Miller's Canyon, Ramsey Canyon, and Ash Canyon in Sierra Vista. Moving east to Portal, we would see the George Walker house, Cave Creek Canyon, and the Southwest Research Center before returning to Tucson to fly home. And on the way to the airport, we'd hit the pond in Willcox for one last list. The plan held up quite well, and all the research paid off. One minor detour was made to snag a Rose-throated Becard in Green Valley. By the way, a note about Becards: they make and abandon hanging nests from previous years. So beware, if you don't see activity at a nest, it doesn't necessarily mean the birds have left the area. They might just be using a different nest. Thanks to the many location clues and tips gleaned from various listers, we were able to find the Becard family at their current residence. Hummingbirds were all over the place throughout the trip. And apparently, the hummingbird migration would not even start for another month. The Rivoli's, Calliope, Lucifer, and Violet-crowned were my favorites. Sitting at a feeder with patience, you can get some great photo opportunities. Not at the feeder necessarily, but when they retreat to a nearby branch. Often, the hummers will pose within a few feet out in the open with great lighting. But you have to focus fast because they are rarely in one spot for more than a few seconds. Arizona regularly has about fifteen hummingbird species, with an occasion additional vagrant. The only U.S. hummingbirds rare to Arizona are the Buff-bellied and Ruby throated.



Calliope Hummingbird
Photo by - Kent Weakley



Varied Bunting
Photo by - Kent Weakley



Violet Hummingbird
Photo by - Kent Weakley



Rivoli's Hummingbird
Photo by - Kent Weakley

On the last full day of the trip, at Cave Creek Canyon, we finally had an encounter with the main target bird of the trip, the Elegant Trogon. After about a half-mile hike up the trail, we heard the call. Quickly moving to the sound, we found him after several minutes. At first, he was sitting straight overhead about sixty feet up, facing away, not a good pose. The trogons sit absolutely still for some time and then jump up and leave. Not having a good shot, I was a bit panicky when it flew through the canopy and disappeared again. Luckily, we relocated him in a much more favorable position. He sat, stared, and allowed me to take way too many photos. Many other trogons live in Central and South America. The Elegant Trogon is the only U.S. visitor. Southeast Arizona is a fantastic place to bird. The trip yielded 60 lifers and 160 birds for the state, all within eight days. Needless to say, this was not a relaxing vacation, but so much more satisfying. I didn't see the Five striped sparrow or the illusive vagrant Rufous-capped Warbler. So, it would seem another trip to Arizona might be necessary soon.

International Adventures

By Leroy Simon

During the spring of this year, I traveled to central mountain area of Costa Rica. I also went to Ontario, Canada 300 miles north of Lake Superior. My first trip was to the central mountain area at 8000 feet elevation. I stayed at Lilliana cabins where I spent 9 nights.

(info@miriamquetzals.com) My booking agent arranged for transport round trip from San Jose airport cost \$300 for the round trip a 2 hour ride. I was picked up in a bus for 11 people, I was the only person besides the driver. The cost of staying there was \$80 per night that included Breakfast. Also I ate a late meal very good filleted trout or white meat chicken without bones or hamburger choice of coffee, tea, juice and sides. I had to keep telling them I wanted smaller portions. (On my last trip I was advised to deal in US \$ only not coins because 1 us \$ is over 500 colons (the Costa Coin) In the more remote areas they might want credit cards. Check on this before you leave the USA.). I needed a guide each morning cost \$150 per day. He picked me up at my cabin at 5:30 AM. He would drive me to where I could see Quetzals. Later in the AM he would take me to an area where they had bird feeders with fruit from a high price hotel. They charged \$25 for a half day but I was allowed to stay as long as I wanted because it was not that busy. This bird feeder had perches that were covered with moss and lichens. I sat in a chair, in a large, covered room open on all sides. The place where I stayed also had bird feeders outside the restaurant, but the perches were only bare branches.

The second trip was to the lake in Ontario where I stayed a week at a fly in to Kag lake. It was a large lake with many bays and islands. 5 of us my son 2 grandsons 1 Great grandson and I stayed in a 4-room cabin. We had warm shower, Fridge and running water (not for drinking) generator, wood burning stove and outhouse. WE had 2 boats with outboards. There were not many species of birds there. I did photograph Loons, Mergansers, red Squirrels, and a chipmunk.

Another rare bird visits an Ocala birdfeeder.

Tami Reece has a talent for finding rare birds in her backyard. In 2022 it was the Dark-eyed Junco that wintered at her house. This May it was something even more rare. When she spotted a yellow bird on her feeder, she initially thought it was a molting American Goldfinch, but a string of events would grab the attention of many. Tami added a photo of the bird to her eBird checklist. When the photo was seen by Ethan Landreville, a 12-year-old avid birder, everything changed. He identified the bird as a Lesser Goldfinch and news quickly rippled across the state. This is only the 2nd time one has been found in Florida. The first bird, nearly ten years ago was only seen by one person! Its normal range is western US, and south to Peru and Venezuela!



Elegant Trogon
Photo by - Kent Weakley



Tanager pair bickering
Photo by - Leroy Simon



Red Squirrel
Photo - by Leroy Simon



Female Quetzal
Photo by - Leroy Simon



Male Quetzal
Photo by - Leroy Simon

Tami knew this was big. She very graciously opened her backyard to anyone who wanted to see it, and during the 15 days it was at her house, 76 people did. People from all over the state came, including Big Year birders, ornithologists, and multiple authors of birding books! Talk about a fun time of meeting fellow birders!

This leads to a good question - How many people have a rare bird visit their yard and don't realize it? Probably many! For this reason, this spring we will be doing a series on backyard birding and recognizing rare birds. Make sure you've joined our Meetup page, so you don't miss this great series.

<https://meetu.ps/c/3BFqr/zncng/d>



Lesser Goldfinch
Photo by-Michele Reyes

Wildlife photographers

You already know there are many beautiful birds and other interesting creatures right here in Marion County, but many of our friends and neighbors have not yet noticed. There's now a new group where you can share any wildlife photos you've taken in Marion County. This group is intended to provide a window for residents to see the beauty in their own backyards and inspire them to go outside and see it for themselves. Join the page to add photos or just enjoy seeing what others share. Find it on Facebook- "Marion County Birds & Wildlife" and share with your friends. Adding one to two photos per post seems to work best. Feel free to post as often as you'd like.



Photo By: Michele Reyes - Blue Grosbeak



Photo by Mish L. Morrison - Veery



Photo by: Kristin Schlegel-
Juvenile Black crowned Night Heron



Photo by Dan Rieck-
Hickory Horned Devil Caterpillar

NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS

All members are welcome to send articles to be included in the newsletter (300 words max.) Photos are welcome. Please include location and identify people or birds in the photo. No heavily edited images please. Our editor reserves the right to edit submissions for length, spelling, grammar, or legal reasons. Please email articles or photos to

marionaudubonnews@outlook.com

Need help identifying a bird? Try out the free Merlin Bird ID app for your phone. (Our YouTube channel has a tutorial). Still stumped? Post it to the "What's this bird?" page on Facebook and you're sure to get a quick response! Click here:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/whatsthisbird>

If it's rare for our area, shoot us a message to let us know what you've found! How do you know if it's rare? (It will come up with an orange box when you report the sighting in eBird.)

WHAT'S THIS BIRD

