



THE SCRUB JAY

A PUBLICATION BY MARION
AUDUBON SOCIETY

Messages from our Presidents

I'm really proud of what our board has been able to accomplish the past several years. We now have a logo, contact cards, T-shirts, and magnetic nametags. Our new website is updated daily with local sightings and offers online payment options. We moved our educational programs to zoom and created a YouTube channel. We are now offering more trips lead by a variety of people to new locations. We created a student club within our chapter and added two student positions to our board.

These significant changes from our dedicated board have brought about extraordinary results. Our recent annual meeting had a record attendance, representing a more diverse age range. Another aspect I'm thrilled with is the activity level of our birders.

In 2019 there were only 8 people who reported more than 100 species for the whole year in our county. This year there were more than 40! Birding in our area has become a lot more exciting.

This year I challenge you to set a goal to report over 100 birds this year on eBird! Too easy? See if you can be in the top 20 in Marion County! Competitive birding is exceptionally fun, and our group is so good about encouraging each other and helping you find birds.

[Find the current eBird rankings here](#)

I'm honored to have been involved in taking our club to a new level. I want to thank our board for doing an amazing job. I'm confident the club is in good hands and will soar to new heights with Kent and the fantastic board we have in place.

Michele Reyes
Outgoing President
Marion Audubon

Introducing our new board for 2024-2025

President: Kent Weakley

Vice-president: Max Weakley

Secretary: Tami Reece

Treasurer: Marty Schwartz

Memberships: Liz Stakenborg

Conservation: Barbara Schwartz

Programs: Alex Witkowski

Student advisor: Maddie Barber



Top 10 eBirders for 2023:



- Steven & Darcy Shaddix
238
- Scott Robinson
237
- Elizabeth Stakenborg
224
- Tami Reece
216
- Alice Horst
196
- Michele Reyes
195
- Brett Bickel
190
- Kent Weakley
189
- Douglas Richard
188
- Tom Hince
177

New birds for Marion County
2023

- *American Oyster Catcher
Michael Baker
- *Neotropic Cormorant
Tom Hince
- *Lesser Goldfinch
Tami Reece
- *Lark Sparrow
Tom Hince

Dear Marion Audubon Society Members,

I am honored and thrilled to address you as the incoming president of the Marion Audubon Society. As I step into this role, I am filled with gratitude for the incredible legacy left by my predecessor, Michele Reyes, and a deep sense of excitement for the journey ahead.

Our club is not just a gathering of bird enthusiasts; it is a community of kindred spirits who share a passion for birds and a commitment to positively impacting our local environment. I want to take a moment to express my appreciation for everyone. Your dedication and enthusiasm have made our club a vibrant and welcoming haven for birders of all levels. As we embark on this new chapter, I want to share our vision for the future, which centers around three core pillars: community, conservation, and education.

Community:

Our club has always been more than just a group of people with a shared interest; it is a community, a family of birders. Whether you are a seasoned birder with a lifetime of experiences or someone just starting to explore the fascinating world of birds, your presence enriches our community. Together, we will continue to provide a supportive and welcoming environment where everyone, regardless of their level of expertise, can feel inspired, encouraged, and connected through our shared love for birds.

Conservation:

Our commitment to improving birding for everyone goes hand-in-hand with our dedication to strengthening, protecting, and highlighting our community's birding sites. The landscapes we explore and the species we encounter are sources of joy, wonder, and critical components for local birding. As stewards of our environment, we will actively engage in initiatives to safeguard and enhance the habitats that make birding in Marion County truly special. We can ensure that future generations inherit a thriving and biodiverse natural world through habitat restoration projects, conservation partnerships, and advocacy efforts.

Education:

An essential part of our mission is to educate the community about the importance of birds in our area. Birds are not just beautiful creatures; they are indicators of the health of our ecosystems. By understanding their behaviors, habitats, and migratory patterns, we gain valuable insights into the overall well-being of our environment. We aim to foster a deeper appreciation and knowledge of our local birds through educational programs, workshops, and outreach initiatives. Together, we can inspire a new generation of conservationists and bird enthusiasts who will carry the torch forward.

In conclusion, I want to express my gratitude for my warm welcome as your new president. I am confident that we can achieve great things together with your continued support and active involvement. Our shared passion for birds binds us, and it is through our collective efforts, we will leave a lasting legacy for the birds and birders of Marion County. Here's to another year of discovery, connection, and conservation. Let's soar to new heights!

With gratitude and excitement,
Kent Weakley
President
Marion Audubon Society

Upcoming Events and Programs

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

Bald Eagles and other Raptors...

It's Bald Eagle nesting season!

Interested in helping us monitor a nest 1-2 times/month? Let us know!

We also need help this spring monitoring Florida Scrub Jays, Kestrels and nest boxes of Bluebirds.

In September 2023 the Ocala Wetland Recharge Park was added to the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail, a listing of locations throughout Florida known for their wildlife viewing and recreational opportunities.

[Read more about it here.](#)

Also, this just in-She's back! A Vermilion Flycatcher, normally found in the west, spent the winter last year at the Ocala Wetland Recharge Park. On October 31st, she returned.

She will likely stay until late February, so go see her while you can.

Maybe next year she'll return with a brightly colored mate!



Vermilion Flycatcher

Photo by- Michael Warren

Michele Reyes was interviewed for an article in 352 Preview Magazine -

FOR THE BIRDS

"On a crisp morning you open the windows, and, if you are lucky, you're greeted by the happy chirping of birds...."

[You can find out more here...](#)

Christmas Bird Count

Our annual Christmas Bird Count Results

This year's CBC faced some challenges. Sickness forced 12 volunteers to stay home. The remaining 41 volunteers, including 16 first-timers, were split into 9 teams to cover the 15-mile circle.

While the forecast initially looked miserable, the rain held off until 10am which gave us all at least 2-3 hours of birding. Our teams did an amazing job and ended up finding 104 species!

Only 2 fewer than last year. Highlights included a Woodcock found by Steven & Darcy Shaddix, our count's first Bonaparte's Gull found by Liz Stakenborg and our first Black-throated Green Warbler found by Michele Reyes.

Thanks to all our volunteers and especially those who continued birding in the rain!

New program series!

How many people have a rare bird visit their yard and don't realize it? Probably many!

For this reason this winter we will be doing a series on backyard birding and recognizing rare birds. You'll learn how to attract more birds to your yard with feeders, water features, plants and nest boxes. Plus we have prizes to giveaway, including a SMART BIRD FEEDER with built-in video and camera! Make sure you've joined our Meetup page so you don't miss this great series.

50% off annual State Park pass now thru Jan 13

[Click here](#)



Bald Eagle Catch
Photo By- Kristin Schlegel



Black throated Green Warbler
Photo by-Michele Reyes

Reminder-Wading Bird Survey

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 the 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.



Time to begin your LIST

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. The time period runs from January 1st thru December 31st, there is no time like now to begin your list!

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.

Renew your membership for 2024?
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



Member Spotlight



Tami Reece, "I am an avid photographer. I love anything outdoors. I became interested in birds when I was out hiking and taking photographs. I began wanting to identify them. Now I am addicted!"



I love my pets. I have a dog and a cat.

I volunteer every week at MTRA, Marion Therapeutic Riding Association. We work with children who are in speech therapy or have other disabilities."



I am **Kristin Schlegel**. I recently took on the role as editor and put together of news and information for our group newsletter. Please feel free to send along - (MarionAudubonNews@outlook.com) your travel notes and photos or a highlight like this of yourself briefly describing your interests in Marion Audubon. I would describe myself as a beginning birder. Although in recent years I have steadily increased my identifying skills, I have done little travel outside of the county for my encounters and have only begun thinking about counts and target species. It is the abundance of wildlife in, and passing through Marion County that amazes me. Recently I have set up several feeding stations in the back yard and enjoy setting my phone out on a branch close by with my Merlin app recording, usually 20 minutes at a time. What fun to see there are so many visitors! Now to find them! I joined Marion Audubon because it is a club that supports protecting wildlife habitats in our community. I look forward to meeting club members while perhaps participating in bird counts, wading bird surveys, or making record of a bald eagle nest this year. It looks to be eventful and a lot of firsts for me, see you then!



Field Notes from our Club Members

Local Adventures

By Darcy and Steve Shaddix

Our favorite place to bird in Marion County is Halpata Tastanaki Preserve.

There have been 141 species of birds identified on the property.

A few times a year, on behalf of Marion Audubon, we lead a group of members to drive the property and record the species of birds seen. Our favorite sighting yet was the Alder Flycatcher seen in 2023.

Sparrows thrive here, mostly during the winter. Admittedly, sparrow species are challenging to identify, however, we've been able to photograph nine species on the property including, SASP, SWSP, GRSP, SOSP, WTSP, CHSP, WCSP, BASP and FISP.

Halpata is comprised of 8,146 acres with 17 miles of hiking and biking trails. A variety of plant communities occur on the property, including floodplain swamp and oak scrub along the Withlacoochee River and longleaf pine turkey oak sandhills occurring in upland areas. Recovering stands of oak scrub scattered amid the sandhill support the threatened Florida scrub-jay.

We have seen a decrease in the Florida Scrub Jay population but know a few spots where they can still be seen.

We hope that you'll join us during the next Halpata outing.



White Throated Sparrow



Song Sparrow



Alder Flycatcher

Photos by Darcy and Steve Shaddix

Trip report by Michele Reyes

My husband and I took our kids to South America this summer to improve our Spanish and do some adventuring. Most of our time was spent in Peru where I found memorable birds such as Horned Screemers, the rainbow-faced Bearded Mountaineer in Sacred Valley, and Diademed Sandpiper-Plovers near Colca Canyon, which by the way, is twice the depth of the Grand Canyon! Machu Picchu was incredible! We hired a guide for the day who not only gave us historical information, but new right where to take us for the Inca wren. There are so many fascinating ecological sites in Cusco, which turned out to be great birding spots. I was delighted to find a deceit of Andean Lapwings at Sacsayhuaman. We spent four days in the Amazon jungle with Eco Peru Tours on the edge of Manu National Park. Getting to the river requires an 8-hour drive from Cusco on a mostly dirt road which descends the Andes from an elevation of 11,150 ft to 2,600 ft through a variety of habitats, boasting a bird list of over 1,000 species! (That's 1/10th of the world's species!) It is not for the faint of heart, as it winds along the mountains' edge, but it is a gorgeous, breathtaking view the entire drive. We stopped in the cloud forest to visit the Cock-of-the-Rock lek and visited numerous hummingbird gardens along the way. One morning we took a boat upriver in the dark to watch hundreds of parrots, parakeets, and macaws come to a clay lick at dawn. At night we hiked through a cave where we found bats, tailless whip scorpions and a rainbow boa! I'll never forget spotting my first penguins (Humboldt) with Blue-footed Boobies off the coast of a fishing village where feisty sea lions roam the streets like dogs. Nor the day I found three species of flamingos (Andean, Chilean and James') on salt flats at nearly 15,000 feet elevation, while a volcano smoked in the distance. In Peru I ended up with a total of 314 birds, including 30 species of hummingbirds, plus a variety of monkeys, alpacas, vicuñas, viscachas and a single agouti. If you'd like to hear more about Peru or other parts of South America, you're welcome to contact me.



Andean Cock-of-the-Rock



Bearded Mountaineer



Humboldt Penguins



Cinnamon Flycatcher

Photos by - Michele Reyes

Trip report- Kenya by Tami Reece

Dreams do come true. For much of my life, I had dreamed of taking an African Safari. This was not a birding trip. I have only recently become a birder so when I planned this trip, I was not considering a birding adventure.

This Safari with Affable Tours included two nights in Nairobi, then travel to Amboseli, Aberdares, Mount Kenya, Lake Naivasha and finally to the Masai Mara. I knew in the Masai Mara I would probably get to see the "Big Five" and (keeping my fingers crossed) see a Wildebeest migration!

Since gaining an interest in birds, I found the number one birding hotspot in the area, Nairobi National Park, has documented 524 species! It was not part of the Safari package, so I contacted the number one eBirder and was able to hire him as a guide.

He picked me up the morning before my safari began and our adventure began. I saw 181 species in one very long, exhausting, but amazing day! Two things I learned about the birds in Africa, they are very vocal, and they are very brightly colored for the most part.

The incredible number of species found here is due to the park's four different ecosystems- rivers, dams, Savannah grasslands, and forests. At one point we were escorted by an armed guard along one of the rivers. Here I was able to observe the Malachite Kingfisher and a Pearl-spotted Owlet!



Yellow-Bellied-Oxpeckers



Weaverbird

Photos by Tami Reece

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 Kristin Schlegel - Coopers Hawk (juvenile female perhaps)

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

WHAT'S THIS BIRD

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.)

