



THE SCRUB JAY

A PUBLICATION BY MARION
AUDUBON SOCIETY

President's Message

This fall brought some major challenges. Just as our season was about to begin, I became physically unable to lead the scheduled walks so events had to be postponed. As we wondered how events could continue, a beautiful thing happened, a handful of members volunteered to lead walks for us. Now we've enjoyed birding at a variety of places with people who each bring different skill sets. This is good for us all and it's how we will continue going forward. Thank you to everyone who has stepped forward to lead an event. We couldn't do this without you!

Michele Reyes

Upcoming Events and Programs

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

May 13- Global Big Day

Every May across the world birders attempt to see as many species as possible on the Global Big Day. We will be kicking the day off with a guided birding trip at Ocala Wetland Recharge Park at 8:30am. Last year on GBD, we found 49 species there, including a Blue Grosbeak, Common Ground Dove and 5 species of warblers! We encourage you to bird more throughout the day and see how many you can find.

[https://ebird.org/news/global-big-day-](https://ebird.org/news/global-big-day-2023#:~:text=Be%20a%20part%20of%20birding's,birds%20you%20find%20with%20eBird.)

[2023#:~:text=Be%20a%20part%20of%20birding's,birds%20you%20find%20with%20eBird.](https://ebird.org/news/global-big-day-2023#:~:text=Be%20a%20part%20of%20birding's,birds%20you%20find%20with%20eBird.)

Save the Date:

Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 16, 2023.

This summer, our Ocala Nature Club will be hosting another nothing night for all ages. Make sure you're in the Marion Audubon Meetup group to be notified of that event. <https://meetu.ps/c/3BFqr/zncng/d>

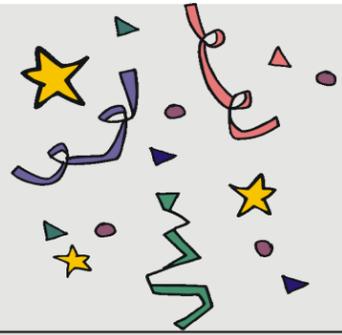
June challenge:

2022 was the first year (I'm aware of) that Marion Audubon participated in June Challenge - a competition to SEE the most ABA species of birds in the month of June. (Only hearing the bird and non-native species don't count.) We had 6 birders submit their numbers.

Congratulations to winners, Steven and Darcy Shaddix with 108 species and Scott Robinson with 107 + 1 non-ABA species! It's also interesting that 16 more species were reported than last June (123 vs 107)! Join us in June for this fun, friendly competition! Read rules and enter your list here:

<https://floridabirdingtrail.com/june-challenge/>

So far this year we've offered a visit to the bird banding lab, driving access to public land that is normally only accessible by foot, a nothing night, glass-bottom boat tours for students, and guided trips to numerous sites covering new places and old favorites. In September, members will receive an email with our schedule of organized outings and educational opportunities for this fall. All events, scheduled and pop-ups, will be posted to Meetup.



Back-to-back hurricanes made 2022 a banner year for Marion County birding. We had 13 birds recorded for the first time in our county!

Congratulations and thanks to the finder of each bird.

Black-headed gull
(Doug Richard)

White-winged Scoters
(Tom Hince)

Greater White-fronted
Goose
(Alice Horst)

Brewer's Blackbird
(Scott Robinson)

Lapland Longspur
(Douglas Richard)

LeConte's Sparrow
(Gary Stone)

Pomarine Jaeger
(Kent Weakly)

Brown Noddy
(Tom Hince)

Bridled Tern
(Tom Hince)

Red Knot
(Tom Hince)

Red-necked Phalarope
(Tom Hince)

Arctic Tern
(Tom Hince)

Black-bellied Plover
(Scott Robinson)

Rescuing Ocala Wildlife



Marion Audubon hosted a guided birding tour for Rescuing Ocala Wildlife (ROW) at Tusawilla Park on February 18. It was a lot of fun and we had over 20 people attend. There was a combination of new birders and some existing members. I am so happy that we could support ROW and their wildlife rescue efforts. It is a good idea to keep their information handy in case you come across an injured bird or other wildlife. <https://www.rowildlife.org>

Going Native for the Birds

Marion Audubon was recently approved for an Audubon Collaborative grant. Our proposal involves the creation of a native plant garden at the Ocala Wetland Recharge Park. Marion Audubon, in conjunction with our local Florida Native Plant Society, will teach students the importance of native plants in relation to our local species and our environment. Our student board members, Alex and Jesse are also involved and will help us find volunteers from the College of Central Florida and Vanguard to help plant and maintain the garden. They will also research the plants and create identification plaques describing the plant and its benefit to our environment. We hope to include a bird feeder, bird seed and pamphlets so the students will be able to identify the birds that are attracted to the garden.

Marion Audubon received a bequest in memory of Kathy Owens.

We are hoping to incorporate the bequest into our native plant garden as well.

Wading Bird Survey in Review

Liz Stakenborg, our Conservation Chair, attended the Regional Conservation Committee's meeting on February 6. One of the main projects we discussed was the creation of a Wading Bird Survey in conjunction with Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. The FWC has not conducted a statewide wading bird survey since 1999. The committee members decided this is something we certainly would be interested in pursuing. We decided to have a member from each interested chapter volunteer to gather information on what this project would entail and then present to the various chapters to determine the interest and feasibility to proceed. There were at least three rookeries/nesting sites in Marion County that were on the FWC survey in 1999.

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.

Board additions for 2023

We have three new student board members:
Jesse Guerrero from Vanguard High School has been assisting with our Ocala Nature Club events. Preston Ballard from Florida State University has been coordinating events and promoting the Ocala Nature Club plus running the Instagram accounts for both ONC and Marion Audubon. Alexandra Witkowski from CF has been leading trips, helping with behind-the-scenes tasks for us, and recently took over table events and arranging our monthly educational programs.



Front row (left to right), Alexandra, Preston, Michele

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

We have 95 paid members for 2023.
Join or easily renew online thru our website:
: <https://marionaudubon.org/membership>

If you haven't yet renewed, you may renew on our website: <https://marionaudubon.org/membership>

Want an official MAS name tag?
We're placing an order soon. Cost is \$6
Email marionaudubon@outlook.com to be added to the list.



Michele Reyes started birding in 2015 while volunteering at Desert National Wildlife Refuge in Nevada. Birding quickly became a passion and just two months later she was guiding birding walks at the refuge. Birding led to an interest in all creatures when she spent five months in Ecuador with her husband and twins. Together they have traveled all 50 states and 6 provinces of Canada (all but Hawaii by RV), and enjoy traveling internationally.

Birding has added a whole new level of enjoyment to her outdoor adventuring, so she now enjoys helping others become aware of the beauty of God's creation surrounding all of us.

Michele served Marion Audubon for two years as VP and now, President, and is also the founder of our Ocala Nature Club for students. She guides trips, built and maintains our website and Facebook page, and mentors high school students in Florida Audubon's CLI program. She is happy to have recently turned over event planning and educational programs to new volunteers.

Marty and Barbara Schwartz have been members of Marion Audubon since 2013. Over the years they've served in a variety of roles. Barbara spent 4 years as our Conservation Chair and currently serves as our secretary plus coordinates our Christmas Bird Count. As Conservation Chair, Barbara received three grants from National Audubon Society. She worked with students from the College of Central Florida and Vanguard High School. She mentored a Conservation Leadership Initiative student from UF for two years. Marty has served as VP, President, newsletter editor, and now as our treasurer over the past eight years. During Covid, Marty kept the Chapter going with Zoom meetings & educational programs, recording them and uploading them to our chapter's YouTube Channel. Barbara & Marty both serve on the Audubon Florida Eagle Watch team and have been graciously covering our table events for the past couple of years. Barbara is a retired health care provider; having spent 32 years as a Registered Nurse. She went back to school and got a degree in Traditional Chinese Medicine and practiced here in Ocala for 9 years before retiring in 2010. Marty worked as a Systems Analyst for UF Health, Senior Project Leader for Alachua County Government, and retired as a Network Administrator for Philips Electronics.

See their recent Eagle Update in our Field Notes....



Field Notes from our Club Members

AUDUBON FLORIDA'S EAGLE WATCH PROGRAM UPDATE From Barbara & Marty Schwartz

American Bald Eagles are found only in North America. Florida has one of the largest populations of breeding Bald Eagles. The Eagles in the northern states tend to be larger than those here in the south; they also nest and breed later in the year. In the southern states breeding takes place from October to May. The northern states breed from February/March-July. The male and female look alike, but the females are larger and more dominant. They breed in the same area every year, often in the same nest. The nests are quite large and can weigh up to 2 tons! Bald Eagles, like many other species, mate for life.

The American Bald Eagle is a conservation success story. In 1963, there were fewer than 500 breeding pairs in the U.S. This was due to the use of DDT, hunting, and loss of habitat. Banning the use of DDT and putting the Bald Eagles on the Endangered Species List helped the population to rebound. By 2006, there were 978 breeding pairs in the U.S. In 2007, they were removed from the Endangered Species List. They are still protected by Federal and State Rules. It is illegal to take, pursue, shoot, poison, wound, kill, capture, trap, collect, destroy, molest, or disturb in any way. In Florida, disturbing the nest during breeding season is the biggest problem. If the nest fails due to disturbance, severe penalties will be applied.

Here in Florida, the Eagle Watch program began in 1992 under the aegis of Audubon Florida. The program covers 53 of our 67 counties. There are 620 volunteers monitoring 1,100 nests. The volunteers visit the nests at least twice each month, October through May, and report the nest data for each visit. In 2021, there were 1,134 Eaglets fledged. In 2022, there were 986 fledged.

From September-November, we monitor the nest for possible relocation, restoration activities, courtship, and copulation. In December & January, eggs are being incubated and the adults are taking turns sitting in the nest. In January & February, the eggs hatch, and the adults brood and feed the nestlings. Since one egg is laid each day, they hatch at different times. In February & March, we begin to see the heads of the eaglets popping up in the nest. The eaglets are brown and do not develop a white head and tail until they reach 5 years of age. By April and into May, the eaglets are seen perching on the side of the nest or on a nearby branch. They begin to flap their wings vigorously, often jumping up from the branch or nest. The adults are still visiting and bringing food. By the end of May, they have fledged.

Marion Audubon Society has three members currently participating in the Eagle Watch Program. Tami Reece is monitoring a nest in the Ocklawaha Prairie. Marty & Barbara Schwartz are monitoring 2 nests here in Ocala. Both nests have one eaglet. In 2020, MR190 fledged 3 eaglets. In 2021 & 2022, 2 were fledged. This year, we started out with 2 in the nest; one has not survived. MR186 fledged 1 last year and will most likely fledge 1 this year as well. 2022 was the first year that nest was monitored.



Photo by: J-P Leemans



Photo by: J-P Leemans

Joy and Bruce Munster have been receiving some great visitors to their water and feeder features outside their window and screened areas this spring. The joy of a pair of Painted Buntings and identifying a Hermit Thrush are just two of the unique sightings they have enjoyed this year.

Members enjoyed our annual visit to the Prairie Creek Banding Lab, hosted by Jonathan Varol (Alachua Audubon). During this event we saw how birds are captured, their sex, wing length and weight are documented and finally banded before being released. The data collected helps researchers understand behavior, migration, longevity, and other valuable information.

*Watch for this again in the fall for students and spring for adult members. Space is limited and RSVP is required thru Meetup.

On three different weekends Steven and Darcy Shaddix led driving excursions thru Halpata-Tastanaki, normally only open to foot and bike traffic. Permits allowed us to drive our small groups along the trails from end to end and along the Withlacoochee River all in one day!! What a great opportunity to be teamed up with so many awesome birders and enjoy the large preserve!!

Our Member Michael Warren is raising bird awareness with his recent addition to the *Ocala Gazette*- "During a recent conversation with the publisher, Jennifer Murty, we ended up talking about the therapeutic value of birding in a world that feels crazy at times. Half joking, I told her what her newspaper needed was a bird of the week and she loved the idea. LuAnne suggested the title, "Michael Gives you The Bird" but that didn't fly! It's been a great way to share the variety of birds in Marion County and to support community journalism."

Thanks, Michael, for sharing your great idea with so many of our community members and bringing attention to the bird population surrounding us!

More beautifully photographed birds by Michael and recent posts can be found here:

<https://www.ocalagazette.com/bird-of-the-week-2023-week-11/>



Photo by: Bruce Munster



Photo by: Bruce Munster



Photo by: Michele Reyes



Photo by: Ken Brazzel



Great Egret, Little Blue Heron, and Mississippi Kite are lovely photographs by: Michael Warren

Congratulations to Tom Hince, he is featured in the April issue of the Ocala Style Magazine. Read about his birding beginnings, his Marion County big year and wildlife photography here:

<https://www.ocalastyle.com/a-rare-bird/>

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: Dan Reick-Belted Kingfisher



Photo by Elizabeth Stakenborg-Grasshopper Sparrow



Photo by: Kristin Schlegel-
Great Crested Flycatcher



Photo by Elizabeth Stakenborg-
Swamp Sparrow

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

