



## President's Address:

With the New Year comes a new chapter for the Marion Audubon Society (MAS). As we move closer towards spring, we must continue to enjoy our wintering visitors while they call Marion County home before heading back north in the coming months and keep a watchful eye out for any early arrivals returning from the south.

Marion Audubon has many birding events scheduled for this spring, both open to the public and exclusive for paid members like you. These are all posted on our MeetUp page ([www.meetup.com/marion-audubon-society](http://www.meetup.com/marion-audubon-society)), so make sure to sign up before the spots fill up! Feel free to share these with your friends, and don't be shy to invite them to join us. We're always happy to see new faces!

MAS will also be hosting a monthly walk at the Ocala Wetlands Recharge Park on the first or second Saturday of each month, in addition to our other public and members-only events. This will provide an excellent opportunity for new and experienced birders to hone their skills and see the changes each month brings to one of our most popular birding locations.

Probably the most exciting event I'm currently finalizing the details on is a private boat ride down the Silver River hosted by the Silver River Museum. This isn't currently posted to our MeetUp account, as I am working on the final details and permissions before making it public, but I wanted to share this exciting news with you all first. Keep an eye out for the notification from MeetUp when this event goes live!

With ongoing tasks like Project 150, increasing the species count in more Marion County eBird hotspots to 150 species, and investigating ways to help both our club and community, 2026 is shaping up to be a great year for MAS.

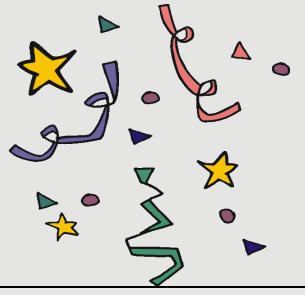
Finally, I want to congratulate Scott Robinson for listing the most birds in Marion County for 2025, with a total of 220 species! I can't wait to see who takes on a Big Year for our county in 2026 and what your total will be.

Thank you all for helping to make Marion Audubon Society such a wonderful birding group for our area. I look forward to serving as your new president, and I can't wait to see you all out at our upcoming events!

Thank you,  
Maxfield Weakley  
President, Marion Audubon Society  
[maxweakley@gmail.com](mailto:maxweakley@gmail.com)



MARION AUDUBON  
MEMBERSHIP CLUB  
SIGN-UP



Congratulations to our  
Top eBirders and record  
breakers from 2025:

**eBird**

- Scott Robinson  
220
- Tom Hince  
211
- Brett Bickel  
204
- Steve & Darcy  
Shaddix  
195
- Elizabeth  
Stakenborg  
187
- Tami Reece  
186
- Michael Baker  
172
- David Rakes  
164
- D Smith  
163
- Michael Warren  
157
- Maxfield  
Weakley  
154
- Greg Drawbaugh  
146
- Michele Reyes  
144
- Douglas Richard  
140
- Alice Horst  
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- Paula Poblete  
138
- Raci Ulusoy  
137
- John Haas  
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- Michael Brady  
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- Preston Ballard  
134

# Upcoming Events and Programs

Our Events Schedule is often updated, you can find us on Facebook for news, Instagram for photos and on Meetup for events.

Please RSVP through the Meetup app which will also keep you informed of all events. If you're not on Meetup, you will miss out on some special last-minute opportunities for members!

Join us as we walk around the parks looking and listening for birds. We will identify what we find and teach you how to identify birds on your own.

We include specialty walks, these are designated ( $\Delta$ ), and are for paid members.

They offer an opportunity to explore new birding hotspots in and near Marion County for new and experienced birders and photographers.

Additional events will be added, so be sure to keep an eye on the Meetup page to see walk details and sign up. Driving instructions are essential for some locations and will be posted for the event.

Marion Audubon also offers educational events/speaker series are online using Zoom.

These are also posted on [Meetup](#) and this is where you will find the Zoom link to attend the events. These events are open to the public and are free to attend unless otherwise posted.

Dates and events subject to change.

You can click [HERE](#) for any of the quick dates listed below to register or check the Meetup app for updates before the event, especially when the weather is questionable.

## January

17



800am-Walk

Ocala Regional Sport Complex

24



700am-Walk

Halpata Tastanaki

31



800am Walk

Sunnyhill  
Restoration

## February

7



800am-Walk

Ocala Wetland  
Recharge Park

21



800am-Walk

Ocklawaha Prairie

28



800am-Walk

Tuscawilla Park

## March

7



800am-Walk

Ocala Wetland  
Recharge Park

14



800am-Walk

Marjorie A. Hoy  
Orange Lake

21



800am-Walk

Emeralda Maresh

## April

4



800am-Walk

Ocala Wetland  
Recharge Park

11



800am Walk

Fort De Soto  
State Park

25



800am Walk

Carney Island  
Recreation

## Associated News

### Some 2025 Statistics

by Kristin Schlegel

It was not a record-setting year in Marion County. The previously record breaking year last year goes unmatched for 2025. Many local birders have spoken about the decrease in numbers, some with concern for changes in weather and development displacement. A big congratulations still needs to be said for another year of searching and finding many of the species visiting our area!

Thanks to the great eyes and ears along with learned identification skills of our local birders, FOUR new birds were found for the first time ever in Marion County.

Our list now stands at 312 birds! Below are the new county birds with their finder(s):

Bronzed Cowbird (Michael Baker)

Ross's Goose (Jason Glatt)

Black Scoter (Anonymous Birder)

Nanday Parakeet (Josh Groskopf)

In review of our TOP 10 hotspots for Marion County we see new names recording species and it is encouraging to see the e bird activity grow. Check out our top 10 sites with number of species reported for all time.

1. Ocklawaha Prairie Restoration Area 215
2. Marjorie A. Hoy Memorial Park at Orange Lake Overlook 203
3. Carney Island Recreation and Conservation Area 201
4. World Equestrian Center 189
5. Orange Creek Restoration Area 189
6. Ocala Wetland Recharge Park 187
7. Sunnyhill Restoration Area 181
8. Halpata Tastanaki Preserve 173
9. Heagy Burry Park 170
10. Silver Springs SP 167

Can we challenge everyone to report at least 100 species in 2026?

Let us see if we can beat the 42 folks from 2025 Top 100 Birder's list with more than 100 birds.

## Christmas Bird Count Wrap-Up

with Michele Reyes

Christmas Bird Count Recap

This was the 126th year for the National Audubon Christmas Bird Count, and 20th year for our circle. December 20 brought great weather for our 44 volunteers who split into teams and scoured our 15-mile circle in Southwest Marion identifying 110 species!

Thanks to those scouting ahead of time and birding after, we were able to add four additional species that were seen during the count week, including a Song Sparrow, and a single Florida Scrub Jay found by Steven and Darcy Shaddix! Other highlights include Painted Buntings, a variety of ducks, 3 species of owls, plus a Rufous Hummingbird that keeps returning annually to Carol Yarnell's feeder! A huge thanks to all who participated! Here's our trip report if you want to review the birds and birding locations. <https://ebird.org/tripreport/431964>

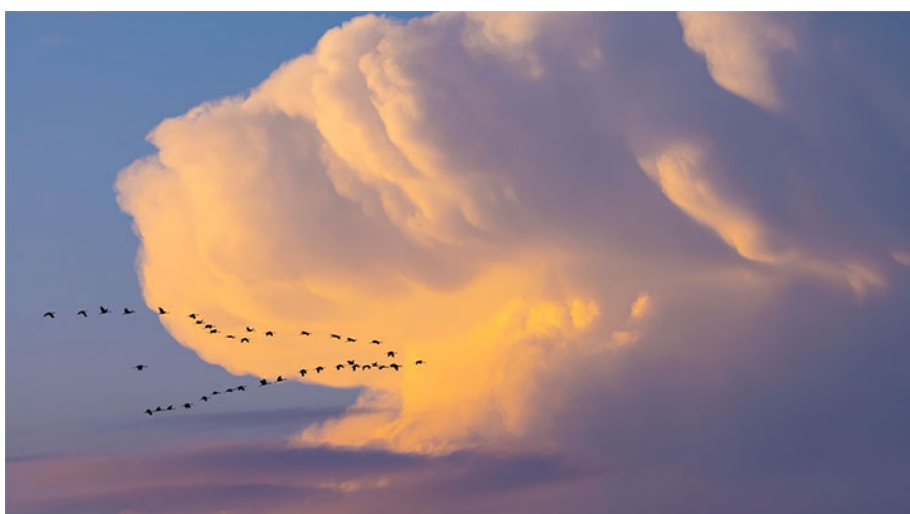
Mark your calendar now for next year's count on Saturday, December 19, 2026.

Michele Reyes

CBC Coordinator & Compiler

## Member Mentions

We found a member photo that was recently featured for an online article with Audubon.org. It is a beautiful photo, congratulations Maxfield Weakley on your image-Sandhill Cranes and also earning an Audubon Photography Award.



# Member Trip Reports

## Thailand and Cambodia by Michele Reyes

Last winter my family spent a month exploring Southeast Asia. In Thailand we hired a local guide to take us to Doi Inthanon National Park where we saw huge waterfalls, stood at the highest point of Thailand and learned about the two Hill Tribes that live in the park. We ended up with 77 species, thanks to a great guide and good timing; December to February provides the best birding opportunities. Some favorites were the Leafbirds (yes, there really are such things!), and the Collared Falconet which is about half the size of our American Kestrel!

Large parks in Bangkok offer relief from the chaos of the busy city, with surprises of tiny owlets and kingfishers. Our favorite part of Bangkok is Bang Kachao, a green jungle island oasis within one of the largest cities in the world! We walked or biked from our homestay to Sri Nakhon Khuean Khan Park where we saw so many birds including Malkohas, Bee-eaters, Sunbirds and Drongos, plus, monitors and a snake doing its job to keep the invasive birds in check. In coastal Kao Lak, a local saw me birding and invited us to bird his 20-acre property. We walked from his property to the coast and picked up a huge list of birds and a handful of lifers.

Bang Pu is a stopover point for gulls migrating to Russia. We arrived at just the right time to watch hundreds of them taking food directly from extended hands!

In addition to birding, we visited temples and markets, rode the water taxi, tuk-tuks and songthaews, spent time with monks learning about their culture, and ate lots of mango sticky rice, plus one large scorpion!

In Siem Reap, Cambodia, we toured three of the most popular temples including Ta Prohm where nature is fighting back as enormous trees grow thru and over the stone temples. The following day, I birded the rice paddies and lotus ponds of Phnom Krom by tuk-tuk where my guide helped me find three species of Kingfishers plus many new birds! As the sun began to set, I gathered my family around a particular tree and we watched in amazement as the tree came alive with hundreds of enormous fruit bats (aka "flying foxes" with a wingspan up to 4.5ft!) that were roosting in it.

Let me know if you are interested in hearing more about the trip or would like contact info for guides. Here's my eBird Trip report:

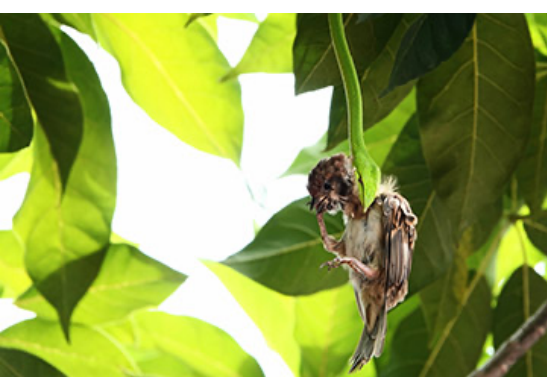
<https://ebird.org/tripreport/293699>



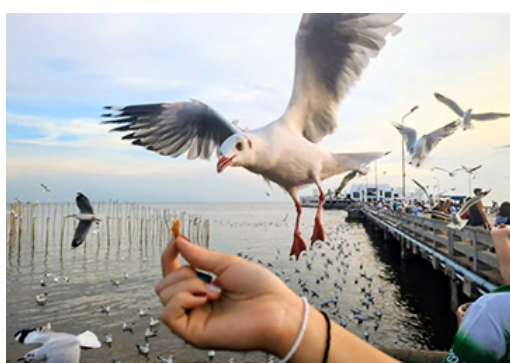
Green-billed Malkova



Spotted Owlet



Indochinese Long-nosed Whipsnake with Eurasian Tree Sparrow



Brown-headed Gull

## Uganda by Elizabeth Stakenborg

I recently had the opportunity to travel to Uganda on a birding trip in August of 2025. My sister, Ann, also went with me and our friend Tammy who really organized and researched the trip.

Although the State Department listed Uganda as a Level 3 travel risk (reconsider travel) we found it extremely welcoming, and we felt very safe the entire time.

There were some issues getting there due to a delay in my flight from Orlando to Miami which caused me to miss my connection to Doha, Qatar and also to miss my flight to Entebbe, Uganda. I managed to get to Entebbe the next afternoon after staying the night in a pod at the Qatar airport! Luckily, I got there just in time for our first excursion! We had a fabulous time – nearly 500 birds, 8 unique lodges/hotels and wonderful guides and group to travel with.

This tour started off with a bang as we spent our first morning searching for the highly sought-after Shoebill at Mabamba Swamp. After that, we continued on to many of Uganda's incredible National Parks including Murchison Falls, Kibale, Queen Elizabeth, Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, and Mburo.

Uganda has a huge diversity of habitats in a relatively small area including tropical rain forest, savannah, woodlands, wetlands, montane forest, and rivers.

Each habitat supported a different diversity of wildlife. The road system in Uganda was very sketchy with lots of dirt roads full of potholes.

We had two giant land cruises that had the pop up for game viewing.

There were 8 birders plus our 3 local guides. We were able to spread out to allow everyone to have better chances of seeing the birds and wildlife.

On many of our trips we were accompanied by armed guards to ward of the possibility of an animal attack! We also had a few boat trips (fairly small boats so we could get in close to see some of the more elusive birds – including the amazing Shoebill.) We saw many varieties of bee-eaters and sunbirds, kingfishers, as well as lots of different eagles and raptors.

Our bird list ended up being nearly 500 birds on this 16-day trip!

In addition to an amazing number of bird highlights, we also saw many wonderful mammals including Mountain Gorillas, Chimpanzees, a Leopard, Giraffes, Wart Hogs, Elephants, Rhinoceros, Lions, many different antelopes, monkeys, and a cute Blotched Genet (small cat).

We stayed at some beautiful lodges as well. All of the lodges had internet, so we felt fairly connected and we had great food as well.

We traveled with Sabrewing Nature Tours out of Indiana. Rob Ripma is the owner, and he was great! I would definitely recommend! Our local guides were amazing as well. I have attached a picture of them!

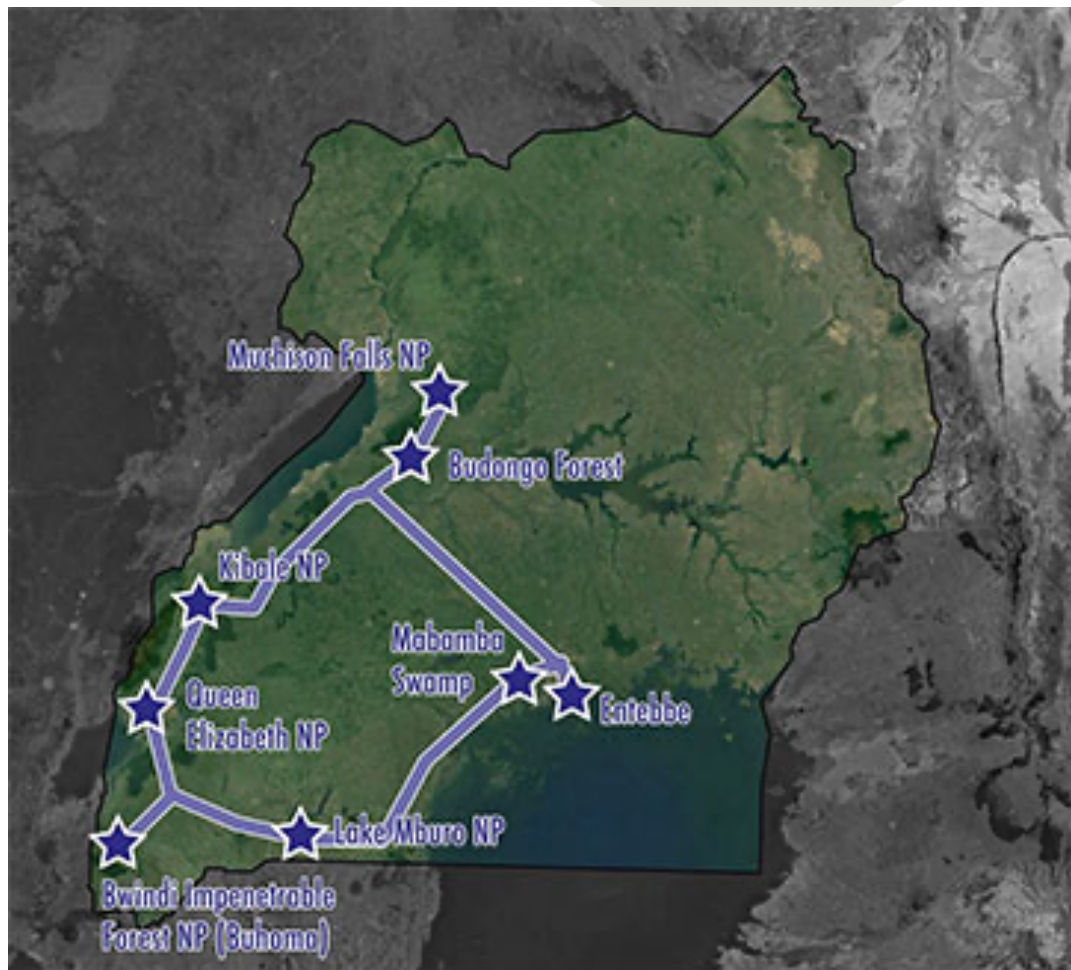
Highlights were definitely the Shoebill, the Mountain Gorillas (we were so close), the Chimpanzees and getting to see my first Leopard and a really cute Blotched Genet.

It is also fun when your guides get excited about a bird as they did with the Harlequin Quail, African Finfoot (a cute duck).

I thought you might enjoy seeing the trip report. <https://ebird.org/tripreport/405894>



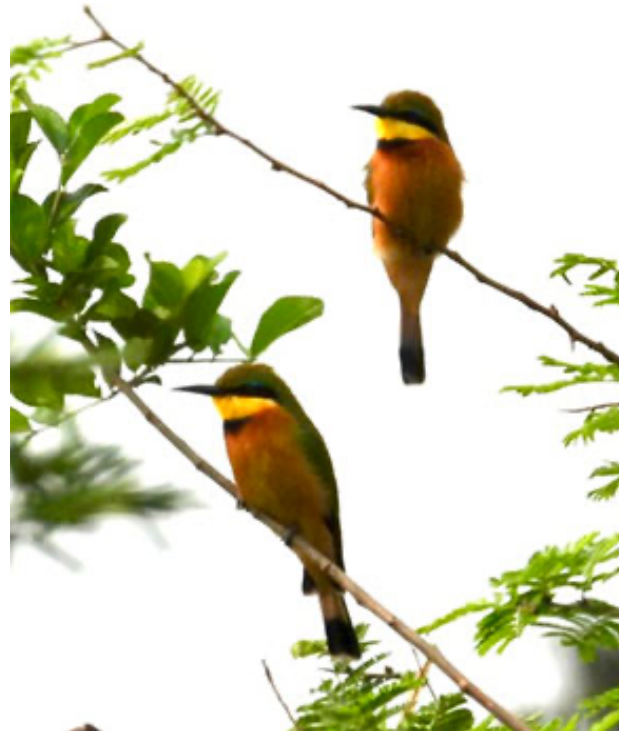
Our guides – Davis and Judith



Uganda Tour Route



Shoebill



Cinnamon Bee-eaters



Papyrus Gonolek



Mountain Gorilla



Grey Crowned-Crane

# Additional Club Announcements

## Marion Audubon Society Board Members:

President - Maxfield Weakley

Secretary - Chris Foster

Membership - Elizabeth Stakenborg

Treasurer - Martin Schwartz

Communications - Kent Weakley

Newsletter Editor: Kristin Schlegel

Ocala Nature Club and Website: Michele Reyes

Conservation - Barbara Schwartz

A big thank you to our newly elected Board Members for 2026-2027!!

As our club continues to grow, we continue to look for the support of our members. We appreciate your participation in our club events along with sharing your interests in nature activities and conservation efforts in Marion County.

Want an official

MAS name tag?

We will be placing an order soon.

Cost is \$6.00

Email [marionaudubonmemberships@outlook.com](mailto:marionaudubonmemberships@outlook.com) To be added to the list.



Renew your membership for 2026?

Our current count is 150 plus members!

Join or easily renew online thru our website:

: <https://marionaudubon.org/membership>

## 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](mailto: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.)

### 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.

