



THE SCRUB JAY

A PUBLICATION BY MARION
AUDUBON SOCIETY

A Message from our President

Dear Members,

I am immensely grateful for our collective recent achievements as the Marion Audubon Society. Each showcases our shared commitment to bird conservation from the successful tree planting at Ocala Wetland Recharge Park, our new logo, to the backyard birding program.

As we dive into spring migration, I am thrilled to know many people will benefit from our planned bird walks. These walks not only offer opportunities to witness the marvels of bird migration but also serve as reminders of the vital importance of our ongoing conservation efforts.

Your dedication, enthusiasm, and unwavering support are the driving forces behind our successes. Together, we continue to make a positive impact on the birds and habitats we hold dear.

Here's to another season of discovery, appreciation, and unity in our shared love for the avian world.

Warm regards,
Kent Weakley
President Marion Audubon Society

The members of the board were able to meet outside for a monthly gathering of thoughts, we celebrated and awarded the good work of Michele Reyes, as many achievements for the club have been accomplished under her presidency term of membership, a big thank you to you Michele.



It was also great fun to see everyone rather than the usual monthly zoom. I must say, putting birders outside in an active birding trail for a meeting...wait, “look, is that a Great Crested Flycatcher?” And “I think I see a Black and White Warbler...” are going to be more the topic of discussions and interests than the meeting agenda, good times!



Top 10 eBirders going into 2024:



- Scott Robinson 189
- Tami Reece 187
- Tom Hince 179
- Brett Bickel 165
- Elizabeth Stakenborg 161
- Steven and Darcy Shaddix 156
- Douglas Richard 146
- Alice Horst 138
- Michael Baker 136
- Michael Warren 126

A reminder and a thank you to our Board members of 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

Upcoming Events and Programs

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

On May 4th at 11am Gabi Sullivan, Water Resources Conservation Coordinator with the City of Ocala, will be giving a free presentation at the Appleton Museum titled, "Connecting Y(our) Water." From the aquifer to you, discover how water flows throughout the City of Ocala and the role that consumers have in protecting this precious resource and the surrounding landscapes it connects. This falls on free First Saturday, so stay and check out the exhibits, including Outsider Aviary...

Outsider Aviary: "Birds of America".

Robert W. Smeltzer Sr. spent 25 years carving birds from John James Audubon's "Birds of America" book. The Appleton Museum of Art has 36 of his sculptures, with tools and his copy of the book on exhibit until August 4. Admission is free on the first Saturday of each month.

Read more about the artist and exhibit [HERE](#).

The Appleton Museum will also be showing the 2017 documentary,

"Audubon" on July 6 at 11am and 2:00pm. [Admission is free](#).

The program, filmed in locations where Audubon painted, brings to life his timeless paintings with dazzling footage of the living birds he immortalized – and celebrates visually the natural world he described in his writings. Interviews reveal the man, explore his art, and put his groundbreaking work in modern perspective.

Global BIG Day MAY 11



Last year, Global Big Day collected more data about birds on a single day than ever before. More than 58,000 people gathered 3.2 million bird observations on 148,000 checklists, setting [new world records](#) for a single day of birding. Will you help us make this the year we surpass 150,000 checklists on a single day?

[Click Here for Cornell Lab ebird.org](#)

June challenge:

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.) This is a friendly competition designed to keep us birding through the summer heat while non-birders retreat indoors and miss all the fun. The aim of the competition is for individual contestants to see as many bird species as possible within the boundaries of his or her county between June 1st and June 30th.

2023 information should update soon for 2024, [HERE](#)

Have you read or heard about Project 150?



Marion Audubon Society presents Project 150 with the purpose of encouraging more birding and improving bird counts at various Marion County hotspots.

You can learn more about the ten target locations and join in adding species to Marion County birding locations. Heck out the details on our website [HERE](#).

Associated News

A big thanks to members sending along articles of interest...

Slow birding a different way to be a birder...

Written by **Drew Monkman**, a retired teacher and co-author of "The Big Book of Nature Activities".

To see past columns, recent nature sightings and his other books, go to drewmonkman.com.

.... Slow birding is an approach to connecting with birds and nature that moves the focus to all that inhabits a specific place, maybe your own backyard or neighborhood. As the name suggests, it's about slowing down and being in the moment with birds. In addition to simply identifying a bird and maybe learning its song, it means asking yourself, "How much deeper can I go and what behaviors can I notice?" It means being happy with the birds you DO see, instead of feeling frustrated by those you miss.

Read more about "Slow Birding" [HERE](#).



The Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission newsletter recently featured an article about the Ocala Wetland Recharge Park and newly designated bird and wildlife trails, you can read more about it [HERE](#)

The recent eclipse prompted many to be outside for an afternoon of observation. As a birder it was of interest to note that other birders also observed bird behavior, [HERE](#) is a quick journal note from a fellow birder from the Adirondacks. Did you record any observations you would like to share from your eclipse experience?

The Backyard Birding Series was a success in many ways, we are happy to get the word out!! With each program there was information new birders can find helpful in attracting birds to their back yard, identifying those visitors, and learning about data collecting with ebird. We recorded the series and will be available on our website for future interested birders. Congratulations to our prize winners, and everyone, we look forward to more birds heading your way.

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.



Barbara's Story

My family moved to Miami, Florida in 1950. I was five years old and so very fortunate to grow up in the tropical paradise that was Miami back then. Unless we were in school or there was a thunderstorm, we kids lived outdoors. Bare footed and happy we ate the fruits that grew abundantly in our yards and our neighbors' yards. I started college in 1962 at FSU. It was a two-day drive on US 27 to get to what was then a small, old-fashioned campus in a relatively small town. After college, I returned to Miami and began my career as a Registered Nurse.

One of my friends was an avid birder. We went to Sanibel Island for a week of tennis and beach walking. It was beautiful and undeveloped. The wildlife at the Ding Darling Nature Preserve was amazing. On our way back to Miami, we drove past a small wetland area and suddenly my friend slammed on the brakes and made a sharp U-Turn; yelling "Roseate Spoonbills!!!" A beautiful flock indeed.

I joined the Miami Audubon chapter around then and went on their field trips. This was in the early 1970's. I still have my first bird book; a Roger Tory Peterson! I started what was then called a "life list." Since moving to Ocala in 2001, I have not been able to find that fragile piece of paper.

After a 32-year career in nursing, I went back to school and earned a degree in Traditional Chinese Medicine. What a wonderful way to help people! I practiced full time for nine years; retiring in 2010 at the age of 65. It was time to explore all the wonderful opportunities to enjoy the lush natural environment of Marion County. Hiking trails, bike trails, rivers to kayak, and birds to watch!

Marty's Story

During an 11-year career in the Navy I received my degree in Systems Analysis from Miami University in Ohio. I moved to Gainesville FL to pursue my MBA at UF and began working at Shand's hospital which was followed by working in Alachua County government. I retired after working at NA Philips Electronics providing network and server support for their MRI Devices design facility. Barbara and I have always enjoyed biking, explored hiking trails, and kayaked with our friends. Everything we need to enjoy the great out-of-doors we find right here in Marion County.

We joined MAS in 2011. We have many wonderful memories. We were fortunate to represent our chapter at three Audubon Florida Annual Assemblies. We got to hear a fascinating presentation by the author of "The Big Year"; the book that became the movie that inspired many birders. We've both served on the MAS Board for several years in various capacities. Marty has been Vice President, President, and is now Treasurer. I've served as the Conservation Chair and the Secretary and am currently the Conservation Chair once again.





Ocala Wetland Recharge Park-Goes Native!

By Liz Stakenborg

On March 8, 23 volunteers and members of the Marion Audubon Society, gathered at the Ocala Wetland Recharge Park to plant over 80 native plants in selected locations throughout the park.

Marion Audubon collaborated with Deborah Curry of the Big Scrub Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society and Gabi Sullivan, water resources coordinator for the City of Ocala. Together we worked to select plants which will attract pollinators and birds to the park.

Our project was funded by a grant through Audubon Collaborative Grants.

The plants include Sand Live Oak, Myrtle Oak, Lyre-leaved Sage, Starry Rosinweed, Darrow's Blueberry, and Beautyberry among others.

Native plants require little maintenance and far less water than introduced plants and provide nectar for pollinators including hummingbirds, native bees, butterflies, moths, and bats.

The native nuts, seeds and fruits offer essential food for all forms of wildlife.

We will be adding signage that will describe the various plants and their benefits in helping preserve our environment and biodiversity.

We hope you come out and enjoy the park.

Our goal is to educate the community about the importance of native plants and birds and spark an interest in nature and a desire to protect our environment.

The Ocala Wetland Recharge Park was recently added to the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail and is one of the top birding hotspots in Marion County with over 170 species being seen and identified at the park!



My Big Year....so far.

By Tami Reece

I decided to do a Big Year.

Thirty years ago, while I was standing in my backyard in Minnesota, a giant bird flew into my backyard and up into a large oak tree. I ran into my house and grabbed my camera and ran back out, hoping it would still be there. It turned out to be a Pileated Woodpecker. Maybe this was my “spark bird”? If you would ask me five years ago, what a robin looked like I would’ve said it had a red breast. I could never have told you that it had a white eye ring. And I saw Robin’s all the time in Minnesota. I saw lots of different birds, but really didn’t give them much thought.

When Covid hit I began hiking on a regular basis. I was mostly hiking and taking pictures. I began taking pictures of birds. I began taking an interest in what those birds were, and even more of an interest in what they did, and about their behaviors. When I moved to Ocala, a Dark-eyed Junco visited my bird feeder. By this time, I was using eBird to document my sightings. Well, little did I know that it would be of interest to the rest of the birding community and soon I was being asked if they could visit my yard.

That was when I met Michele (then President) and others from the Marion Audubon, and I haven’t looked back. I am a passionate birder. I seem to love all things bird!

So, I decided I would do a Big Year in 2024 in Marion County. When I decided to do this, I set a goal, I decided to do a Big Day on January 1st with a goal of 100 birds. Several friends helped me and we were up at 4 AM and out the door before the sun came up to catch the nocturnal species. We did not finish birding until after dark. I ended my day with 104 species, one exotic species and two other taxa. Goal number one complete!

At that point I decided to set a second goal. I wanted to get 150 birds by the end of January. That seemed doable since I already had 104, what was 46 more birds? Well, I quickly learned that was a little more challenging. However, when the month ended, I had 152 species with six other taxa!

My last goal will be to try to have a photograph of each of the birds that I have seen for the year and finally to challenge myself throughout the rest of the year to find as many birds as I possibly can.

I would not be where I am now as a birder without the mentors and now friends of the Marion Audubon!

If you see me, wish me luck! And if you want to go birding let me know!



Photos below are by Tami Reece



Eastern Kingbird



Louisiana Waterthrush



Painted Bunting Female

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.

A Summer Sizzler Challenge

How many people include bird observations on their summer vacations? Perhaps many! But do you record them on ebird? This summer the challenge to add sightings from other locations is on, and for you to look back at the end of the summer and tell us. What you were seeing when you were away from your own backyard may just earn you prizes. Make sure you send along your journal notes to be included in the raffle drawing and we will feature stories and photos in our next newsletter for September.

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.)



