



THE BROWN PELICAN

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SARASOTA AUDUBON SOCIETY

FEBRUARY 2021

Message From the SAS Board of Directors

Dear Auduboners,

In spite of COVID suppressing nearly all of our activities, things are still happening in the bird world. On 22 January, Redstart Birding held a birding optics show and demo in the Nature Center picnic area. People came by appointment to this COVID-safe event, and its overwhelming success proved that there is a real need in West Coast Florida to view, sample, and purchase optical equipment. Thanks to Redstart and Wendy Clark for organizing it, and to Jeff Bouton and his team from KOWA optics for leading demo walks. We expect this to be an annual event, so stay tuned.

At Sarasota Audubon, we are striving to keep in touch with you all. In addition to our monthly newsletter, *The Brown Pelican*, last spring we developed a monthly e-blast: *What's Up! Winging in the Gap*. In addition to our regular second Monday Zoom meetings and presentations, we have introduced monthly Wednesday Zoom programs.

- 27 January, Chris Wood: eBird: What Happens to All That Data?
- 24 February, Andrew Crowe and Ani Black (beaming to us from New Zealand) on Polynesian migration of birds and humans.
- 24 March: Kathryn Young will show us how to navigate and enter data into eBird.
- 21: Jonathan Slaght discusses his quest and research for the world's largest owl, Blakiston's Fish Owl.
- 26 May, Jeff Bouton will show us how to select birding optics.

Margi Haas, our Program Chair, gave a presentation on Swallow-tailed Kites to Venice Area Audubon on 26 January. If you missed it, you can access it by going to the VAAS website.

And don't miss Kathryn Young's *Feather Wars*. This fab presentation can be seen via the link in the February *Brown Pelican*.

Last but not least, please don't forget your membership dues! We count on each and every one of you to re-up every year. Here's a link: <https://www.sarasotaudubon.org/product/pay-membership-dues/>

Stay safe.

Monthly General Zoom Meetings

FEBRUARY MEETING

MONDAY
8 FEBRUARY
7:00pm

PLEASE NOTE: Until further notice our monthly meetings will be conducted online via ZOOM. Specific access details and directions will be provided by email and the SAS web site prior to the first meeting. They will also be repeated for each monthly general meeting.

Each meeting will allow for a 10-15-minute Q&A at the end of the presentation. You will be able to type in your question during the presentation.

Back From the Brink: Florida Panthers



Bill Samuels, president of The Florida Panther Project, will address the key issues and players in saving the Florida panther for future generations.

**2020-21 MONTHLY
MEETING SCHEDULE**

SLIDE PRESENTATIONS

SLIDE PRESENTATIONS FOR YOU TO ACCESS, LEARN FROM, AND ENJOY!

"The Feather Wars" – Kathryn Young, Sarasota Audubon

At Sarasota Audubon, we have been working on slide presentations on a variety of topics. The first one was on the Christmas Bird Count. Our second one is "The Feather Wars," about North American birds on the brink of extinction due

to the fashionable trend of wearing hats made from bird feathers. We hope you enjoy these presentations. Click the link below to view "THE FEATHER WARS"NOTE: the file is a .pdf, DO NOT click on the "open with google docs" option as it is not equipped to view a pdf. Simply scroll and enjoy!

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xMSoeem_7ikZPBM6PYgM44vRKN6KnjYX/view?usp=sharing

Sarasota Audubon Member in SRQ Magazine

Check out this link to an SRQ Magazine article about SAS member John Groskopf:

https://www.srqmagazine.com/articles/1444/The%20Outsiders:%20The%20Bird-Watcher?fbclid=IwAR2o_knO5jJL1toqzOXQpspybv1XhP8KxSehLxdPK3WlvgnNfUDa39fJonQ

Report from the 70th Annual Christmas Bird Count

By Stu Wilson

The 70th annual Sarasota Christmas Bird Count (part of an Audubon series now in its 121st year), held on 2 January 2021, produced 158 species (pending review of seven rarities). This tally would have gone down as a good, if not very good, count during "normal" times. However, set against the heightened expectations resulting from our superheated counts of 2018/2019 (all-time record of 173 spp) and 2019/2020 (2nd highest all-time count of 164 spp), it can't help but rank as a slight disappointment. We just didn't seem to have the "fallout" of stalled neotropical migrants on this count that we had on the previous two.

Our results weren't for lack of effort, however. Despite the pandemic threat, we had 128 volunteer observers in the field and another 7 reporting from their backyard feeders. This was about the same number of individuals as last count and just five percent or so below that for the 2018/2019 count. With volunteers broken down into smaller COVID-safe parties, we tallied relatively high party-hours and party-miles. The weather on count day - no rain, temps in the 70s, and southerly breezes - was more or less a non-factor.

We had one first-ever species on the count: the dreaded Gray-headed Swampphen, actually a group of four of them. An unwanted invader from Asia, they're known to outcompete their smaller cousins, Purple Gallinule, while trashing marsh habitat. Besides the swampphen, six other species were documented and submitted for review: a Common Nighthawk (just the second nighthawk ever reported on our CBC), four Merlin from four different count circle areas, a pair of Yellow-throated Vireo (just the 2nd or 3rd time this species has been reported), a trio of White-crowned Sparrow (2nd time ever), an American Redstart (reported on just four previous counts), and a Dickcissel. That last species has actually appeared on 11 previous counts, but not since 1966! There was no photo obtained of the nighthawk, so odds are that it will go down as "nighthawk sp" given the difficulty of separating Common from its congeners Lesser and Antillean.

A number of additional highlights included: Ruddy Duck, King Rail, Virginia Rail, Short-billed Dowitcher, Barn Owl, Red-headed Woodpecker, Sedge Wren, Chipping Sparrow, Bronzed Cowbird, and Ovenbird. Species impressive for the number of individuals recorded were: Redhead (a raft estimated at 600 has made a winter home at the Players Course pond at Prestancia), Red Knot (nearly 200), Bald Eagle (a count of 55 is potentially our highest of the post-DDT era), Northern Flicker (5), Merlin (4), Peregrine Falcon (6), Purple Martin (9), and Eastern Meadowlark (5).

Purple Martins had been recorded on the Sarasota CBC only four times previously, but now it's anticipated that we'll see a lead scout sometime during Christmas week (this time around it was on 26 December 2020). The explanation is likely either the reliable and well-tended PUMA housing provided at the Nature Center -or- climate change... or a little of both. Eastern Meadowlark makes the list above not because five is a huge number of individuals, but because over recent years we've struggled to record the species at all on the count, a victim of disappearing grassland prairie habitat within the circle.

An All-Time High Count of individuals (or a tie) was achieved with an additional 13 species: Canada Goose (22), White-winged Dove (100 vs the 45 reported last count vs the 35 reported the count before that), Ruby-throated Hummingbird (12 vs the 10 reported last count), Sora (10), Sanderling (1000), Lesser Black-backed Gull (24 vs the 9 reported last count), Red-bellied Woodpecker (310 vs 260), Downy Woodpecker (85 vs 82), Pileated Woodpecker (41 vs 37), Nanday Parakeet (250 vs 170), Eastern Phoebe (74 vs 72), Tufted Titmouse (120), and Prairie Warbler (22 vs 20). That our three "neighborhood woodpecker" species all chose to appear in record numbers on this count, a count now in its 70th year, is absolutely... interesting to say the least. I should confess that the explanation could be as simple as: more party-hours and party-miles this time around, but it also probably has to do with these picids abilities to co-exist with a mushrooming human population. Similarly, the Ruby-throated Hummingbird

record and maybe a couple of the others mentioned above can perhaps be attributed to more stay-at-home eyes on feeders.

The epicenter of the Sarasota CBC was once again Celery Fields (Area #8). Jeanne Dubi put together a crack team, which tallied 125 species, an astounding 32 more than that tallied by any other team (our Circle is divided into 20 areas). In addition, fifteen (15) species were exclusive to Area #8, i.e. found nowhere else in the Circle. Four areas had two exclusive species each. Over the last three counts, Area #8 has averaged more than 16 exclusive species. It would be nice if we could find King Rail, Sora, Barn Owl, Sedge Wren, Marsh Wren, Bronzed Cowbird, etc elsewhere within the circle, but until that happens thank goodness we have Celery Fields!

And now for the lowlights... We had a number of dips as well as species seen only during Count Week (i.e. during 30 Dec-5 Jan but not on count day), amongst them: Greater Scaup (CW), Northern Bobwhite, Piping Plover (CW), Western Sandpiper, Common Tern, Short-tailed Hawk (CW), Crested Caracara, Least Flycatcher (CW), Hermit Thrush, Eastern Towhee, Black-throated Green Warbler (CW), Summer Tanager (CW), and Blue Grosbeak (CW). Seven Count Week species is rather high (we probably average 3 or 4) so having that many can be seen as a bit of bad luck. That was certainly the case at Charles Hoots' feeder where a Summer Tanager had been appearing daily in the run-up to the CBC... but then decided to be a no-show on count day.

Besides complete dips, we had a number of species which appeared in less than stellar numbers: Green-winged Teal (just 2), Short-billed Dowitcher (just 1), Caspian Tern (just 1), Common Loon (just 7), Northern Gannet (just 4), Reddish Egret (just 1), Tree Swallow (just 110), and Ruby-crowned Kinglet (just 1). The list of species that used to be recorded on the count but not much anymore would include Northern Bobwhite, Horned Grebe, Wilson's Plover, Baltimore Oriole, and Eastern Towhee.

The Count included eleven (11) "onesies," i.e. a species represented by just one individual for the entire Count. For comparison, our previous Count included nineteen (19) onesies while we recorded thirty (30) on the count before that. So one way to explain our current count results not quite meeting that of the previous two counts: too many Count Week birds and not enough Onesies.

Our total number of individuals from the current Count, (35,400), was actually three percent higher than last year's count and thirteen (13) percent higher than our count the year prior, the count where we achieved our all-time record number of species.

I thank all who participated and helped continue to make Sarasota one of the premier CBCs, not only in Florida but nationwide. Those volunteers ranged from "old guard" representatives like Ed Hagen, who located a pair of Yellow-throated Vireos at a new location for

that species, to “youth movement” volunteers like Aaron Virgin, a newcomer to Sarasota who agreed to take over one of the areas on short notice and, with “old timer” Peter Brown in tow, came up with the only Chipping Sparrows recorded on the count.

BIRDS IN THE NEWS

[A rare, 'magical' visit from a brilliantly colored bird draws crowds to Maryland park](#)



URGENT -- RENEWAL REMINDER



It's Past Time to Renew!

Our Sarasota Audubon memberships normally run on the calendar year, so it's time to renew for 2021.

Only \$30/year for either individuals or families.
The easiest way to renew is online on our Website:

[CLICK TO RENEW](#)

If you have a question about your membership, please email

[CLICK - MEMBERSHIP](#)

Thanks for supporting your local Audubon Society!

NATURE CENTER HAPPENINGS



The Nature Center remains closed as we monitor COVID. Nature is Open is our new slogan.

Karen Willey
SAS Nature Center Manager

Upcoming Events

SAS Activities



Please visit our website www.sarasotaudubon.org for the most up-to-date information. Also check the Brown Pelican monthly newsletter and eBlasts to alert you to any scheduled upcoming activities.

Bird of the Month -- Lark Sparrow



Sparrows are notoriously difficult to identify with their overlapping ranges and similar brown plumages. Typically here in southwest

Florida, we see some sparrows that spend their winters here – most often Savannah Sparrows, Chipping Sparrows, or Swamp Sparrows. We do get a few uncommon sparrow species wintering here on occasion, one of which is the Lark Sparrow, our Bird of the Month. Normally they spend their winters from southern Texas down in to Central America but there is a small population that spends its non-breeding season here in Florida.

The beautiful Lark Sparrow is a real standout among all New World sparrows with its bold harlequin facial pattern and white edged tail. Besides their unique appearance, a distinguishing behavioral trait is that the Lark Sparrow walks while moving around on the ground. Did you know that almost all other sparrow species hop when on the ground? The Lark Sparrow also has historically enjoyed several odd nicknames. These include “quail head” because of the color pattern on its face & crown. Another name they have also been called the “road-bird” for its commonness along roadways.

One has been regularly seen at the Lake Venice Golf Club, near the end of one of Venice Airport’s runways. First sighted around Christmas, it was last seen in mid-January. Its preferred habitat is grassland areas and shrubby borders. And true to form, this Lark Sparrow has been seen in the grass near the chain-link fence and under small shrubs, feeding on seeds and insects nearby. When it has been around, it has been very cooperative for viewing. If you are heading down near the Venice Pier or Caspersen Beach, stop by the Lake Venice Golf Club parking lot and maybe it will still be there.

References:

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/lark_sparrow

<http://www.birdingisfun.com/2015/03/wintering-sparrows-in-florida.html>

<https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/lark-sparrow>

<https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/larspa/1.0/introduction?login>

<https://nature.mdc.mo.gov/discover-nature/field-guide/lark-sparrow>

The Green Flash

By Lou Newman

(photo credit: Lou Newman) Seeing the green flash is challenging; however, it has been quite prominent and easily observable quite a few evenings in January. The attached photograph was taken Wednesday evening, January 20, 2021, from Plymouth Harbor (on Coon Key) looking out over Lido Beach, Sarasota, Florida.



Green flashes are optical phenomena that occur shortly after sunset or before sunrise, when a green spot, line or "mirage" is visible, usually for no more than a second or two. They are usually seen on a clear evening when there is an unobstructed horizon, such as over the ocean. The reason for a green flash lies in refraction of light in the atmosphere. Light moves more slowly in the lower, denser air than in the thinner air above, and sunlight rays follow paths that curve slightly in the same direction as the curvature of the earth. Higher frequency light (green/blue) curves more than lower frequency light (red/orange), so green/blue rays from the upper limb of the setting sun remain visible after the red rays are obstructed by the curvature of the earth.

CONSERVATION IN THE NEWS

Here is a link to an article about proposed development in our area:

https://www.heraldtribune.com/story/news/local/sarasota/2021/01/19/sarasota-county-consider-10-000-acre-hihat-ranch-development-plan/4203810001/?utm_source=heraldtribune-News%20Alert&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=news_alerts&utm_term=news_alert

NATURE IS OPEN!!

Sherry Rhodes, your newsletter editor
(Photo credit: Sherry Rhodes)

We often state this in the Nature Center News section of the newsletter, just to remind ourselves and our readers that even though many things are closed right now, the great outdoors is open and ready to be enjoyed. We are very fortunate here in Florida that we have both excellent weather and an abundance of wonderful and accessible parks where we can go to enjoy nature in these trying times.



One park I visited recently with a group of friends is Highlands Hammock State Park near Sebring, FL. It is possible to drive there in under two hours without getting on the dreaded interstate. The drive is lovely and very reminiscent of "Old Florida." Once there, visitors can enjoy a variety of trails, several of which have boardwalk sections on them, as pictured here. The park offers a wonderful tram ride, for about 10 dollars per person, through

sections of the park not otherwise accessible to visitors. There are quite a few resident alligators, and the lively and informative tram driver knows exactly where they hang out. We also saw quite a number of wading birds and some raptors from the tram. There are plenty of outdoor tables where visitors can enjoy a picnic lunch while being entertained by many pileated woodpeckers. Be sure to cap off your visit with a piece of the delectable orange pie on sale in the park store!



WORKSHOP MANAGER(S) NEEDED

We need Workshop Manager(s). This flexible volunteer position allows you to create a schedule of 3 -5 workshops per year. Workshops are designed to give a hands on experience about nature or our environment and are presented at the Sarasota Audubon Nature Center. Ideas for workshops come from our members, the county and other sources.

NOTE: There will be no workshops at the Nature Center until SAS officially opens.

Email Kathryn Young for more details — kathwren4@gmail.com

Additions to the SAS Website

It is now easier to make memorial or honorary donations on the SAS website. If you want to donate to Sarasota Audubon either in memory of or in honor of someone, follow any of the Donate links on the Home Page

(www.sarasotaaudubon.org), look for this logo, and fill out the form. You may choose to donate to any one of the following funds: the Endowment Fund, SAS Quad Fund, Celery Fields Nature Center, or Celery Fields Explorers Program.



You may also give a year of SAS Membership as a gift. Look for the Gift Membership button at the bottom of the Membership page (www.sarasotaaudubon.org/membership).

Help build a path to the future

Purchase a commemorative brick!

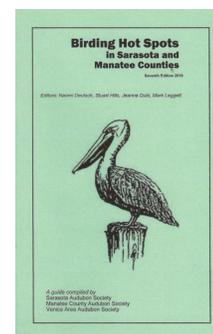


Engrave a loved one's name, or a short quote on a brick to commemorate a lasting tribute, or mark a special occasion. Ask us about other naming opportunities. Truly a gift that gives back.

DOWNLOAD MAIL-IN FORM

BIRDING HOT SPOTS OF SARASOTA AND MANATEE COUNTIES

Can be purchased for **\$8.50 by mail.**
Send a check to:
**SAS, 999 Center Road
Sarasota, FL 34240**





Our Favorite Local Hot Spots

It's Here!

Sarasota Audubon Society's *Online Guide: Our Favorite Local Birding Hotspots*, has been updated for 2020-2021, and is now live on the SAS website!

This revised edition, in addition to enhancing last year's sites with new information and web links for use on your computer, tablet or cell phone, adds seven new Favorites, for a total of 25 nearby, exceptional birding locations! Use it at home or in the field!

To view the updated Online Guide, go to the SAS website, click on the *Birding* drop-down menu and select the *Online Guide*, or click the link below and add it to your Favorites:

[CLICK TO VIEW](#)



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