



<http://www.santafeaudubon.org>

and



Santa Fe Audubon Society - Florida

Santa Fe Audubon Society

Melrose, FL

**JANUARY 2024
NEWSLETTER**

Happy New Year

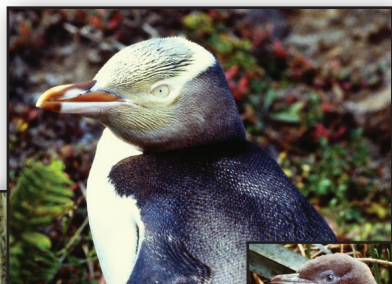
SPEAKER SERIES PROGRAM

**YELLOW-EYED
PENGUINS**

**Tuesday, JANUARY 9
speaker Bill Cooper**

6:45 PM at Trinity Episcopal Parish Hall
204 SR 26 downtown Melrose

You do not need to be a Santa Fe Audubon Society
chapter member to attend our Speaker Series programs.
All are welcome!



Adult

Molting



Chick 55 to 60
days old



There are 18 species of penguins worldwide occurring almost exclusively in the southern hemisphere. Please join us to learn more about 1 of those 18, the Yellow-eyed Penguin/hoiho (*Megadyptes antipodes*), of New Zealand. This species is the rarest of all the penguins and is also "Endangered," according to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, IUCN Red List.

The safety of our membership is of utmost importance, we encourage everyone to, please, wear a mask.

Our in-person Speaker Series may be postponed or canceled on short notice due to health related concerns.

FIELD TRIP

Saturday, JANUARY 20

To reserve your spot email
Laura Berkelman
lberkelman@windstream.net

**MASTERS TRACT
STORMWATER TREATMENT FACILITY**

To reduce the agricultural runoff into Deep Creek, various government entities teamed up to purchase and develop the wetlands known as the Masters Tract. Completed in 2006, it has been a huge success, both in reducing the nutrients and attracting a wide variety of birds. Managed by St. Johns County, it draws water directly from nearby farmland and from the adjacent Deep Creek. Efforts to improve and expand are underway. A good birding spot all year, it is known for the variety of migrants during the winter. Expect to see our long legged waders, migrating warblers, raptors, and a variety of water fowl.

DIFFICULTY LEVEL 2 - May involve uneven terrain; 1-3 miles

For anyone who doesn't want to walk, there are grassy banks along the unimproved parking lot which has a good view of the first pond.

To caravan from Melrose meet on the west side of
Heritage Park at **7:30 AM**
or Masters Tract at **8:30 AM**
7756 Hub Bailey Rd, Hastings, FL 32145

**NO Restrooms at this location,
there are restroom stops on the way.**

We ask that all observe personal distancing and suggest bringing a mask for everyone's protection, in case it is needed. Reservations for each trip will be filled on a first-come first-served basis with waiting lists in case of participant cancellation. Please be sure to include the field trip name and date along with your name, phone number(s) and e-mail address, in case we need to notify you of any changes.

Field Trip guidelines are on page 5.

The Great Backyard Bird Count



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

FEBRUARY 16 - 19, 2024

GBBC

Launched in 1998 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) was the first online citizen science project (sometimes referred to as “community science”) to collect data on wild birds and display results in near real time. Birds Canada joined the project in 2009 to better support participation in Canada. In 2013, the GBBC became a global project when it started using the app eBird (world’s largest biology related citizen science project) for data entry.

Project Goal

Each February, for four days, the world comes together for the love of birds. During these four days people are invited to spend time in their favorite places watching, counting, and reporting as many birds as they can find. These observations help scientists better understand global bird population trends right before Spring migrations.

For 2024

In 2020 a new website was designed to make understanding and recording your 4-day count easier than ever. Santa Fe Audubon encourages everyone to participate. The minimum time requirement is only fifteen minutes, and you can do it in your own backyard or any other favorite birdwatching spot.

For further details and rules for participation, see the website: <https://www.birdcount.org>



GREAT OUTDOORS INITIATIVE PRICE REDUCTION

The Great Outdoors Initiative encourages Floridians to go outdoors and explore Florida’s natural resources, including our award-winning state parks, vast recreation areas and world-renowned waterways. From Oct. 14, 2023, through Jan. 13, 2024, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection is offering Florida State Parks annual passes for families and individuals at a 50% discount. This offer is not stackable with other discount options.

Annual entrance pass discount available through January 13. In our area, passes are available at Mike Roess Gold Head Branch State Park.

For more information <https://www.floridastateparks.org/learn/florida-state-parks-annual-pass-discount>

Melrose Area Christmas Bird Count • December 15, 2023

by Laura Berkelman, CBC Complier

73 birders with binoculars, telescopes and cameras took to the roads, fields, forests, and lakes on December 15, 2023 for the 34rd annual Christmas Bird Count of the Melrose Circle. Covering over 175 square miles in a circle centered at the intersection of SR 100 and CR 219, the same



area has been surveyed by local volunteers on a single day each December since 1990 as a part of a National Audubon Society project that “constitutes the longest running and geographically most widespread survey of bird life in the Western hemisphere.”



This extraordinary example of citizen science was begun in 1901 when many of our iconic water birds were nearly hunted to extinction in the name of fashion. Melrose, interestingly, had one of the earliest counts, led by the Rev. Walter I. Eck in 1907, but there were no more local counts until the current circle was established. That first year, with far fewer observers and considerably less sophisticated equipment, a total of 35 species and 1,145 individuals were recorded.

This year 127 species and 27,627 individuals were tallied. It was the second highest number of species ever counted locally and the third highest number of individual birds.

The most widely spread species was the Northern Cardinal with 17 of the 19 teams reporting cardinals. Tree Swallows, with 6,070 recorded, constituted this year's highest count of individuals, closely followed by American Robins at 5,499. Three other species breaking the 1,000 mark were Ring-billed Gulls, Ring-necked Ducks and Red-winged Blackbirds.

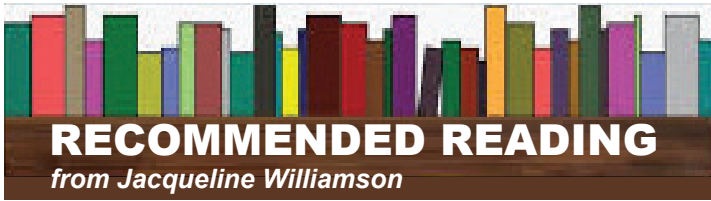
Exciting finds this year included two Eared Grebes, normally found west of the Mississippi, and two Ruby-throated Hummingbirds who have chosen to winter in the area. Other rarities include the Franklin's Gull, Black Scoter and Field Sparrow.

The CBC has grown continuously from its initial 25 to nearly 2,000 count circles across the US and its territories, southern Canada and, increasingly, Latin America. It provides valuable long-term data for researchers studying winter bird populations and for federal agencies making decisions related to birds. More than 300 peer-reviewed articles have already resulted from analyses done with the information gathered by the now more than 50,000 observers who contribute their time.

Santa Fe Audubon Society thanks all participants, including employees at some of the restricted properties and volunteers from the wider region - Gainesville, High Springs, Penney Farms and others – who join the local observers. Thanks, also, to the many private property owners who allow us to cover their properties from parts of Gold Head Branch State Park and Camp Blanding to the Lake Region from Keystone Heights, Florahome, Melrose, Earleton, and Grandin to Melrose Landing and including, among many others, Lake Santa Fe, the Santa Fe Swamp, and Lakes Geneva and Brooklyn.

More information on Christmas Bird Count is available at <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>





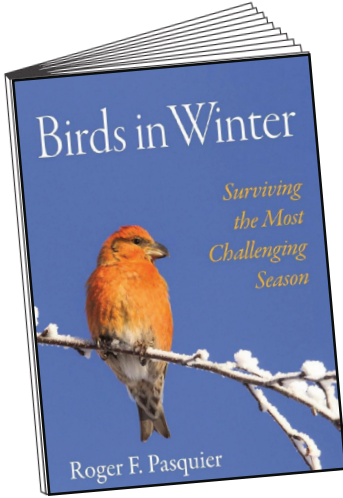
RECOMMENDED READING

from Jacqueline Williamson

BIRDS IN WINTER

SURVIVING THE MOST CHALLENGING SEASON

by Roger F. Pasquier



Roger Pasquier explores how winter affects birds' lives all through the year, starting in late summer, when some begin caching food to retrieve months later and others form social groups lasting into the next spring.

GOOD NEWS

by Jacqueline Williamson

“CONNICK” HEADED TO NATIONAL ZOO



Left: Connick when he arrived at the Center for Birds of Prey. Right: A more recent photo after moving from the Raptor Trauma Clinic to the rehabilitation area. Photos from the Audubon Center for Birds Of Prey web site

A Bald Eagle hatched in January 2023 in a nest on Captiva Island, and watched on the popular nest cam app, Captiva Island Nest Cam, was found in ill health after falling out of its nest. The bird, now named Connick, was rehabbed at Audubon Center Birds of Prey. It has a genetic feather condition and therefore, non-releasable into the wild. However, it is now heading to the Smithsonian National Zoo and will be on display in early 2024.

BIRD OF THE MONTH

HOODED MERGANSER

(*Lophodytes cucullatus*)

band code “HOME”



“Hooded” is something of an understatement for this extravagantly crested little duck. Adult males are a sight to behold, with sharp black-and-white patterns set off by chestnut flanks. Females get their own distinctive elegance from their cinnamon crest. Hooded Mergansers are fairly common on small ponds and rivers, where they dive for fish, crayfish, and other food, seizing it in their thin, serrated bills. They nest in tree cavities; the ducklings depart with a bold leap to the forest floor when only one day old.



Drake (male)



Hen (female)

COOL FACTS:

Hooded Mergansers find their prey underwater by sight. They can actually change the refractive properties of their eyes to improve their underwater vision. In addition, they have an extra eyelid, called a “nictitating membrane,” which is transparent and helps protect the eye during swimming, like a pair of goggles.

The oldest recorded Hooded Merganser was a male and at least 14 years, 6 months old.....in Mississippi in 2009. He had been banded in Minnesota in 1995.

For more information about Hooded Mergansers, and test your duck and waterfowl skills, visit:

www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Hooded_Merganser/overview

Fun Fact: A group of ducks are collectively known as a “brace”, “flush”, “paddling”, “raft”, or “team” of ducks.

SPEAKER SERIES PROGRAMS

February 6, 2024

NEW GRU WETLANDS

speaker Debbie Segal

March 12, 2024

- **CONSERVATIONIST AWARD**
- **PHOTO SHOW**
- **ELECTION OF OFFICERS**

April 9, 2024

THE GULF speaker Jack E. Davis

May 14, 2024

BEES speaker Rachel Mallinger



BIRDING ETHICS

(including photography)

Practical guidelines that aim to mitigate the stress birds and their habitats face when humans intrude.

- Leave pets home
- Bring binoculars
- Mute cell phones
- Gently close vehicle doors
- Talk softly/whisper
- Keep bird call playback and pishing to a minimum.
- Walk quietly in woods (pick up feet)
- Avoid using a flash when taking photographs
- Keep your distance
- DO NOT flush or disturb birds (especially during spring nesting season)
- Stay on established trails
- Be alert for bird sounds/movements
- Coughing/sneezing? Stay away from group or, if possible, in vehicle
- Respect other birders
- Wear earth tone color clothing, when possible
- Stay hydrated and safe

FIELD TRIPS

Reservations will be required & all field trips are subject to date change or cancellation due to weather, etc.

SATURDAY FEBRUARY 24, 2024

(maximum 12 participants)

*Private Wetland Preserve near Rice Creek
Palatka, FL*

MARCH ??, 2024 to be announced

APRIL ??, 2024 (date and details in February)

Gulf Boat Trip (Tidewater Tours) - Cedar Key, FL

SATURDAY MAY 4, 2024

Sweetwater Wetlands Park - Gainesville, FL

FIELD TRIP GUIDELINES

**RESERVATIONS REQUIRED
FOR ALL FIELD TRIPS**

When you make your reservation, please be sure to include your name, phone number and email and the number of participants.



- **BRING:** Water, binoculars, hat, sunscreen, rain gear and face covering.
- **WEAR STURDY WALKING SHOES.**
- **SFAS has sanitized binoculars to loan.**

We all must remember to maintain safe personal distancing.

*We suggest you bring your face mask just in case it is needed.
It is easy to forget during the excitement of bird watching.*