

JANUARY 2020

VOLUME 45, ISSUE 4

# St. Lucie Audubon Society

Fostering appreciation of nature in St Lucie County, Florida, since 1954



## The Laughing Gull

### President's Message

By Ellen Lynch

A whole new decade is in front of us. How are we going to make an impact on our community by promoting awareness for our feathered friends and habitats that need protection? I hope our chapter can be an influence in our county by partnering with like-minded agencies and creating opportunities for residents to learn about conservation and protection of our natural resources.

This is how!! We begin our new decade with a wonderful grant proposal, written by our Conservation Chair, Diane Goldberg, and approved by Florida Audubon and supported by FPL, and the St. Lucie County Environmental Resources Dept. The proposal supports the National Audubon "Plants For Birds" Initiative.

We are going to spend a morning (Sunday, January 12, 2020) planting specific native plants in a county park (Richard E. Becker Preserve) in order to beautify and educate visitors on the possibilities of using native plants for birds and butterflies. So roll up your sleeves folks, let's work together to bring this project to a successful conclusion. Your help that morning will make a BIG difference. Contact Diane Goldberg at [digoldberg@bellsouth.net](mailto:digoldberg@bellsouth.net) to become a volunteer or call her at 772/343-8666. This is an easy job for all ages and snacks will be provided!! YEAH!

See you there!

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*Photo by Dan Marinelli*

Thursday, Jan. 2:  
Speaker: Jerry Buechler

The speaker for our January general meeting will be Jerry Buechler from the Treasure Coast Solar Co-op speaking on “Solar Co-ops & Proven Ways to Reduce Our Carbon Footprint.”

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Saturday, January 18, 2020  
Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge

**Where:** Merritt Island NWR Welcome Center, Titusville, FL

**When:** 06:15 am to 12 noon

**Guides:** Doris & Steve Brookens

**Details:** This is a driving tour on dirt roads. There is a \$10 fee for entry to Blackpoint Wildlife Drive.

We will meet in the Ft. Pierce Home Depot parking lot at 6:15 and will leave promptly at 6:30 am. Full details are available on our website. The birding opportunities are usually spectacular! Bring your binoculars, camera, and scopes to enjoy the birds.

**Contact:** Doris Brookens at cell: 717-576-7876 email: [dorisbrookens@gmail.com](mailto:dorisbrookens@gmail.com). You can register on our website: <https://www.stlucieaudubon.org/field-trips>



**“It is time to make nature and all the beauty living within it our priority.” ~Paul Oxtan**

# Conservation Corner

BY ELLEN LYNCH

Why are we so excited about a grant that allows us to restore native plants to a local habitat? More native plants mean more choices of food and shelter for birds and other wildlife. This choice is important for the survival of native wildlife.

To survive, native birds need native plants and the insects that have co-evolved with them. Most landscaping plants available in nurseries are exotic species from other countries. Many are prized for qualities that make them poor food sources for native birds—like having leaves that are unpalatable to native insects and caterpillars. With 96 percent of all terrestrial bird species in North America feeding insects to their young, planting insect-proof exotic plants is like serving up plastic food. No insects? No birds.

So, to provide appropriate food for our local birds, we will plant over 150 native plants of all sizes that will provide food, cover and nesting areas for birds. It will also provide a learning experience for young and old visitors as tours by the County Environmental Resources Dept will be offered several times a year so people can see what the plants, as well as bird populations look like in different seasons. This project will also transform the site to the preserve with plants that are not only native, but also correct for the hydrology and geology of this area. Join us January 12!



Firebush

## Chapter Dues

The year for local chapter dues runs January to January. Dues can be paid by check or via PayPal on our Web site: <http://stlucieaudubon.org>

- Individual: \$25
- Family (2 or more people): \$30
- Sponsor: \$50
- Patron: \$100

## The Laughing Gull

Photo by Ed Bowes

# Citizen Science

BY ED BOWES

A few quick highlights from our Christmas Bird Count December 14<sup>th</sup>. First, there were very few small birds (warblers, gnatcatchers, etc.) sighted, probably due to the weather. Second, there were lots of other birds! Such as:

- 6000 Turkey Vultures
- 1000 Black Vultures
- Over 500 Cattle Egrets
- Over 20 American Kestrels
- Seven Crested Caracaras
- American and Least Bitterns
- And TWO Snail Kites!

A big thank you to everyone who participated and to Ellen Lynch for organizing the pizza party after the count!

**Eco Evenings** at the Manatee Observation & Education Center in Ft. Pierce happen every third Thursday through March. The theme is “An IRL Water Journey: From the Smallest Particles to the Vastness of Space.” The topic January 16<sup>th</sup> is “Harmful Algal Blooms,” something of great concern to local residents. Visit their website for details: <https://www.manateeeducationcenter.org/>

### Visit our website now to register for our annual Adams Ranch Breakfast and Tour!

There are three dates this year, and space is limited:

- January 18, 2020
- February 15, 2020
- March 14, 2020

The cost is \$30 per person, which includes a full hot breakfast and a tour of the stunning Adams Ranch.

**Reserve your spot now at** <https://www.stlucieaudubon.org/adams-ranch-tour>

### St. Lucie Audubon Officers & Board Members

President – Ellen Lynch

Vice President – Ed Bowes

Treasurer – JoAnn Stillman

Recording Secretary – Kathy Mayshar

Corresponding Secretary - Jan Nuhn

Program Chair – Kevin Hinkle

Birding Adventure Co-Chairs – Adella Blacka, Doris Brookens

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Membership Chair - Carol Pembroke

Events Chair – Harriet Scott

Public Relations – Ruth Neese

Directors at Large – Adella Blacka, Roger Laliberte, John Nelson

Science Advisor – Matthew Anderson

Raffle Coordinator – Wayne Pembroke

Board members may be contacted by email at [stlucieaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:stlucieaudubon@gmail.com)

# The Laughing Gull

## Feathered Friends

BY RUTH NEESE

One of the joys of fall and winter in South Florida is the return of Painted Buntings (*Passerina ciris*). These striking members of the cardinal family only visit our area during migration, and a few overwinter locally. They are not summer residents.

Male Painted Buntings are impossible to miss, with their vivid fusion of red, green, yellow, and blue plumage. This beautiful plumage gives the species its common name. Female and immature males are a distinctive bright green with a pale eye-ring. That means if you see a “greenie” here in St. Lucie Co., you cannot determine if the bird is male or female.

Painted Buntings eat seeds most of the year, and forage on the ground for seeds of wood sorrel, spurge, St. John’s wort, sedge, pine, and various grasses. They can be attracted to feeders, but you must provide the right seed and appropriate landscape. For landscape, you need bushy cover—hedges, brushy shrubs, or yews. This cover must be within four feet of your feeders. Painted Buntings prefer feeders that exclude larger birds like jays, grackles, and doves. In the winter here, the preferred seed for feeders is white millet. So, shrubby cover plus white millet equals visits to your yard from these little jewels.

There is a downside to the habits of our migratory Painted Buntings. The colorful males are illegally trapped and sold as cage birds because poachers know they will be concentrated in South Florida. Illegal trapping is a significant problem in Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties, but you could find cage traps anywhere in South Florida. If you witness anyone trapping these birds, report it to the FWC at 888-404-3922 or [Tip@MyFWC.com](mailto:Tip@MyFWC.com).

*Photos courtesy of Ed Bowes*



## Coming Attractions

### **FIELD TRIP**

Saturday, February 22, 2020

Peaceful Waters Sanctuary & Okeehetee Nature Center

### **GENERAL MEETING**

Thursday, February 6, 2020

Ken Warren from the USFW  
"Mission, Accomplishments, & Current Priorities of U.S. Fish & Wildlife"

## We're on the Web!

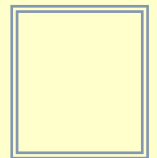
Visit us at:

<http://stlucieaudubon.org>

***St. Lucie Audubon Society***

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