

FEBRUARY 2021

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St. Lucie Audubon Society

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



The Laughing Gull

President's Message

By Ellen Lynch

February is the month associated with the love for one another, and to me it also covers the love of our wildlife and especially our local birds. We still have so many of our winter visitors here to enjoy and learn about. Our guest speaker for our general meeting on February 4th, is just the person to show us the beauty of our local birds. Juanita N. Baker, PhD., will be our speaker and she is a renowned for her photographs and documentation of Florida birds. She is a prominent member of Pelican Island Audubon Society and will show us many of her photos (and, I am told some of Hart Rufe's photographs) that are in her book. She also holds classes on "Intensive Birding" for any interested members. This program will be a wonderful introduction to our local birds for those of you that are still learning about them.

We just received wonderful news that our request for an Audubon Collaborative Grant in the amount of \$1000, has been approved! We are now in the process of signing a Memo of Understanding with our partners in the project, St. Lucie County Environmental Resources Dept. We also have received permission from FPL to use the grant money in our treasury (\$2000) for this project. So, we now have up to \$3000 to use in order to provide needed equipment, materials, and supplies to support the efforts of St. Lucie ERD to band our local scrub jays on county lands in the hopes of better scientific data to support

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Thursday, Feb. 4:
Speaker: Juanita Baker, PhD

Juanita Baker, PhD, Professor Emerita of the Florida Institute of Technology, is Coordinator of Pelican Island Audubon's Bird Photo of the Month. The best of these photos were compiled into a book, *Florida Birds Exposed*. Dr. Baker will be presenting many of the photos from this book.

Field Trip: McCarty Ranch Preserve, Wednesday February 10 from 7:30 to 10:30 AM.

This will be a birding-by-car field trip along the paved entrance road and around manmade lakes. Target species include Downy Woodpecker, Eastern Towhee, herons, and cormorants. **Masks are required for this trip!** Full details and directions are available on our website. For questions, contact Doris Brookens at cell: 717-576-7876 email: dorisbrookens@gmail.com

<https://www.stlucieaudubon.org/field-trips>



“When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.” ~ John Muir

Photo by Hart Rufe

President's Message (continued)

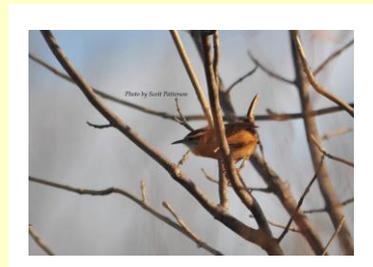
BY ELLEN LYNCH

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their conservation and protect their habitats. Our partnerships with the county and FPL have many benefits and I believe we are on the right track to make a difference in our community and county by working this way with others.

Doris Brookens, our Birding Adventure Chair, suggests we all watch our website for a possible birding adventure at McCarty Ranch Preserve as a driving tour. She is working out the details and it will be on our website as soon as she can get things arranged. Thanks Doris!

Dare I say, after the Inauguration Ceremony we just had, I am full of hope and promise of better days ahead. Let's enjoy the moment and enjoy our feathered friends who are visiting us right now. Happy Birding!



Chapter Dues

The year for local chapter dues runs January to January. Dues can be paid by check or credit card 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

Our Christmas Bird count was a success, thanks to everyone who participated on a team! Here is a bit more information about our count:

- Our teams put in 30 hours and 40+ miles on foot; almost 52 hours and 461 miles by car; and 7.75 hours and 15 miles by boat to get the count completed!
- A total of 116 species of birds were counted, which is the third lowest species count for the last 10 years.
- A total of 20,164 individual birds were counted, which is average for our count.
- There were 12 American White Pelicans counted to go with the 393 Brown Pelicans.
- Roseate Spoonbills numbered 25 and Wood Storks came in at 102.
- One White-eyed Vireo, 11 Common Yellowthroats, two American Redstarts, and one Northern Parula made the list.

Florida has approved a native plant license plate! The Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS) worked very hard to accomplish this goal. The license plate will help fund the mission of FNPS. The catch is that a minimum of 3000 license plates must be pre-ordered before production will begin. To see a sample plate and place an order, visit this [link](#).

The Great Backyard Bird Count is coming in February!

The count runs for four days, from Feb. 12-15, 2021. You can count birds on one, two, three, or all four days. All you have to do is observe birds for at least 15 minutes on one of the four days, then submit your count list. No travel is necessary—just stay in your backyard! Participation is free, but you must create an account. More information can be found [here](#).

St. Lucie Audubon Officers & Board Members

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Board members may be contacted by email at stlucieaudubon@gmail.com

The Laughing Gull

Feathered Friends

BY RUTH NEESE

One of everyone's favorite raptors arrives in Florida as a snowbird—the American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*). American Kestrels are the smallest falcon in North America, living and breeding from Alaska, through Canada and the United States, down into Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. This includes Florida, where the birds breed in Central Florida along the Lake Wales ridge. American Kestrel populations have been increasing recently, and are listed as a “species of least concern” by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.

American Kestrels are one of the few sexually color dimorphic raptors, meaning males and females have different plumage colors. Male kestrels have slate blue-gray secondary wing feathers, a rufous tail with a black subterminal band, and black banding on the underside of the wings. Females are larger than males and have rufous coloration on the wings, backs, and tails. Females' tails have multiple dark brown or black bands instead of the one band present in males.

As a small raptor, American Kestrels hunt small prey. They forage for grasshoppers, dragonflies, mice, voles, and lizards from perches on power lines, dead trees, or roadside signs. Wintering kestrels will also hunt small birds such as sparrows, warblers, and wrens. It is common to see kestrels perched with Mourning Doves on power lines; the kestrels are identifiable by their “no neck” look in silhouette.

Recent research using kestrel DNA indicates American Kestrels are not genetically related to the European Common Kestrel and others in that family. Instead, the American Kestrel appears most closely related to the Peregrine and Aplomado Falcons, having genetically diverged from European kestrels during the Ice Ages. So this winter, look up for a small, Ice Age falcon hunting grasshoppers from roadside perches!



Coming Attractions

FIELD TRIP

February 10—McCarty Ranch Preserve

GENERAL MEETING

Thursday, March 4, 2021 via Zoom

We're on the Web!

Visit us at:

<http://stluciesudubon.org>

St. Lucie Audubon Society

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