We represent Audubon Society members in Northern Pinellas County and provide services to all who are interested: free local field trips with expert birders; inexpensive extended field trips within the US and to other locales, free monthly programs, volunteer & networking opportunities within the local conservation community; scholarships to local summer camps and speakers for a variety of classrooms and groups.

North Pinellas Christmas Bird Count

No, this is not a picture of the North Pinellas Christmas Bird Count. But we did have our most successful count ever. 162 species with over 27,000 individual birds counted on January 2nd. We had 52 participants that spent the day looking at birds in north Pinellas County. Some of the highlights were 15 Barred Owls, a Northern Waterthrush, Bachman’s Sparrow, 3 Rusty Blackbirds, 38 Bald Eagles and 163 Osprey. Although there is no such thing as a bad count, it is encouraging to have a diverse number of species. It is a reflection of a healthy habitat. Thanks for all the people to took the time to volunteer.
Relishing in Raptors

- Barbara Walker

It’s late January, the 19th to be exact. In raptor terms, it is an exciting time of year. Audubon EagleWatch volunteers are monitoring 38 active Bald Eagle nests in Pinellas County. The southern portion of the county hosts the eagle population primarily on cell phone towers, or other man-made structures, with only two nests south of Ulmerton Road remaining in trees. The northern portion of the county still has a predominantly long leaf pine substrate but fewer and fewer super canopy trees exist and those few are prone to lightning strikes. It is also the season when ospreys return to their nests, and nest building has begun. This is a dangerous time for ospreys that have nests that need a lot of refurbishment. The more trips back and forth to the nest the more peril there is. This year heavy winds and rain significantly damaged many nests so I suspect a lot of ‘nestorations’ to occur. The upside, being that fresh materials do not harbor heavy parasite loads and molds, such as Aspergillosis.

My estimate is that we have one of the largest urban osprey populations in the world, with approximately 400 pairs. This year, like previous years, we work to sustain them in safe locations on platforms and concern ourselves over fishing line we see in their nests. Several migrating ospreys wearing transmitters passed through Florida this year. One osprey with a transmitter was attacked by eagles and grounded. We retrieved the wings and the transmitter for the scientist, Dr. Rob Bierregaard, after it was apparent that the bird known as “North Fork Bob’ from Long Island was down. A terrible shame as he was a first time dad. Another osprey, Romeo Richard, took an interesting course from Michigan and traversed the Eastern Seaboard, down through Central Florida close to Tampa Bay and then landed in the Everglades and crossed the state to the east coast. That is where he made his big mistake, turning north, instead of south, he wound up in Boynton Beach. It appeared he was doing well there, fishing in man-made ponds by gated communities until his transmitter stopped. Our volunteers did everything we could to locate the carcass and transmitter but no luck. Our best guess is an electrocution followed by a riding lawn mower.

Speaking of satellite transmitters, as of today the Swallow-tailed Kites are clearly thinking about their return to Florida as well as other states, having made northward motions on January 15 – 17, including ‘Bullfrog’ an adult male that was tagged in our region last summer.

Florida carries the population of Swallow-tailed Kites and we monitor 5-6 nests in Pinellas now. Sadly, the three nests in my neighborhood didn’t fare well due to high winds and rain in March and April. One nest had two beautiful babies that I watched daily and a torrential rain pounded the nest and the young to the ground. Deep in a swamp, it was unreachable. The first nest in my group had failed on hatch day in high winds. The last, I believe, was a siblicide in the first two weeks of hatch. That left just one young kite to grow up to full size but he ended up on the ground and I retrieved him. Weak, he died at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey from severe anemia, likely caused by a heavy parasite load. We hold our breath for the kites safe return and will no doubt delight in seeing them again around the first week of March. By then the ospreys will be going down on eggs and eaglets, the fastest growing raptor, will begin the fledging process and make their journeys northward.

JOIN US AS WE CELEBRATE

BIRDS OF PREY

- Trained raptors in free flight
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Park at Lake Vista Recreation Center (1401 62nd Avenue South) for FREE shuttles to the event.

No pets please.
Officers of Clearwater Audubon Society

**PRESIDENT:** JOHN HOOD  
[link](mailto:president@clearwateraudubonsociety.org)

**VICE PRESIDENT:** SID CRAWFORD  
[link](mailto:blumax100@gmail.com)

**TREASURER:** JANE WILLIAMS  
[link](mailto:jwilli56@tampabay.rr.com)

**MEDIA:** KAY MULLAHEY  
[link](mailto:audubonkay@yahoo.com)

**MEMBERSHIP:** POSITION OPEN  
[link](mailto:membership@clearwateraudubonsociety.org)

**SECRETARY:** LINDSEY DAY  
[link](mailto:secretary@clearwateraudubonsociety.org)

**CONSERVATION ADVOCACY:** RONDA MUSCA  
[link](mailto:rmusca1@tampabay.rr.com)

**CONSERVATION PROJECTS:** DANA KERSTEIN  
[link](mailto:conservation@clearwateraudubonsociety.org)

**CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT:** PAUL TRUNK & RON SMITH  
[link](mailto:fieldtrips@clearwateraudubonsociety.org)

**IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT & CLIMATE ACTION CHAIR:**  
MICHAEL MACDONALD  
[link](mailto:curmudgin@hotmail.com)

**FIELD TRIPS:** PAUL TRUNK  
[link](mailto:fieldtrips@clearwateraudubonsociety.org)

**EAGLE WATCH & OSPREY WATCH:** BARBARA WALKER  
[link](mailto:barbibird@tampabay.rr.com)

**EDUCATION:** LYNN SUMERSON  
[link](mailto:education@clearwateraudubonsociety.org)

**PROGRAMS:** POSITION VACANT  
[link](mailto:programs@clearwateraudubonsociety.org)

**MEMBER AT LARGE:** MARDY HORNSBY

**LEGAL COUNSEL:** R. BRUCE McMANUS  
[link](mailto:lawoffice@mcmanusestateplanning.com)

**WEBMASTER:** PAUL TRUNK  
[link](mailto:webmaster@clearwateraudubonsociety.org)

**WINGBEAT/NEWSLETTER:** MÉICHELLE LONG  
[link](mailto:newsletter@clearwateraudubonsociety.org)
Our friend Mariella passed away and time is slowly allowing upset and sadness to be nudged aside and in their place come wonderful memories of birding trips, shared meals, and conversations. I hear her voice and see that mischievous face full of sun rays and ideas.

On one of our trips many years ago, Mariella chose to linger by the road while the rest of us wandered into a forest cathedral of huge, old oaks. We found a Meadowlark and I watched that bird intently, mesmerized by its enchanting song. When we returned to the road I told Mariella about it and she said she had been watching the very same bird but from the other side and was just as moved as I had been! Years later, we still revel in that memory.

Just after moving to Florida in 2000, I wrote in my birding journal what Mariella said when asked what started her birdwatching. She said, “I fell into it unconsciously. It’s the love of the outdoors that gets you into it.” Simply said and perfectly true.

She will always be with us, somewhere beyond the trees where we cannot see her, but she will be watching as she always did from her own unique perspective.

-Madeleine Bohrer

We all loved Mariella. Her infectious smile and ever present positive approach to life made it a pleasure to be in her company. She never missed a birding adventure far or near and was always eager and totally involved wherever she was.

And such amazing vision, so quick to spot motion in the trees before anyone else.

How many of those well adapted walkers (shoes) did she wear out on birding treks on several continents? And the masses of friends she made in the process!

I will never forget how she showed us all how to scratch gently on a tree trunk to attract the attention of an owl in a hole above. She always contributed so much to each birding adventure. Her laughter, friendship and very presence will be greatly missed.

-Joan Brigham
Program Highlights: Birding among the Beasts in Kenya

The tag team of Tom and Linsey Bell gave a wonderful lecture to a packed hall in January. We had about 60 people present which was close to if not a record number for a normal monthly meeting. We had a contingent from St Pete Audubon as well as a number of new folks recruited from meetup.com. We had to haul out a couple of stacks of extra chairs.

The Bells talked about their trip to Kenya (I think they have a talk about neighboring Tanzania. Maybe in the future ....). Their slides were spectacular and their knowledge base incredible. They have presented to us in the past with their trip to Cuba.

Kenya is about the size of Texas but has a typography more like Colorado. It has the 2nd highest mountain in Africa, Mt Kenya at 17,000 ft. Nairobi, the capital, with 4 million people has the same elevation as Denver and the world’s largest urban bird list of over 400 species.

Lake Nakuru with a bird list of over 450 species was Kenya’s first park established primarily for the birds. It was named Africa’s first important bird area. Both greater and lesser flamingos in their millions forage in the lake. Because of resource portioning there is no competition between the species. The greater forage for crustaceans on the bottom at about 6 inches deep while the lesser forage on the surface algae. Just like our spoonbills there diet causes the pink coloration. Other birds include the lilac breasted roller the most photographed bird in

Africa named for its acrobatic flight, the black backed stilt, and the yellow billed duck. The helmeted Guinea fowl is a social bird. After they awaken in the morning they proceed in single file to the water led by the dominant male as a scout to drink and bath. After which they spread out in a line abreast to forage across the grasslands for bugs. Many African birds have similar counter parts in the Americas e.g. great blue heron = grey heron, snowy egret = little egret, green heron = squacco heron.
Birding among the Beasts in Kenya (cont.)

The oxpeckers work on all the mammals except the elephant to remove ticks and other parasites. Africa’s answer to the hummingbird are the sunbirds. The bronzed sunbird unfortunately is in trouble because its feathers are prized for fly tying. The variable sunbird in spite of being brightly colored forages at night. Just like our hummingbirds their beaks and tongues are adapted for getting nectar from flowers.

The great white pelican is Africa’s answer to our white pelican. Even though its wing span is slightly shorter (6 vs. 9 ft) it is the heaviest of all seabirds at 33 lbs. The hammerkop makes the largest nest for body size of any bird. It has several internal chambers, is decorated with vegetation, and is shared with bids of other species.

Africa has a spoonbill with red legs but it lacks the beautiful rosy color of ours. The African paradise flycatcher has a long split tail like our scissor tail flycatcher. The sacred ibis had a brief stay in southern Florida after they escaped from a zoo in Miami after a hurricane but they have become extinct here. The pied kingfisher is a beautiful bird with the male having 2 bands across its chest and the female having one. They eat their own weight in fish each day.

I’ve touched on only a few of the birds presented and none of the mammals but I think you have better things to do (bird watch) than to read my scribblings. If we can entice the Bells to return and give their program on Tanzania, be sure not to miss it as it will be just as stellar as his program was.  –John Hood
Stewardship: PIPL (Piping Plover) Census

Dana Kerstein and Marianne Korosy were among many in North America and the Bahamas who participated in the PIPL census which runs from January 18 to February 1, 2016. The survey is repeated at five year intervals. Dana and Marianne surveyed the northern half of Three Rooker Bar for four focal species: Piping Plover (the main species), Snowy Plover, and Wilson’s Plover and Red Knots, a species new to the survey in 2016. The three plovers look similar to many people and can be hard to distinguish from afar so it’s helpful to have a spotting scope. The primary purpose of each survey is to count the focal birds and report their location. An important secondary goal of the winter census is to look for banded Piping Plovers and record their unique color and code leg band combinations. Additionally, the survey collects data about disturbance at the survey site and how vulnerable the habitat may be to sea level rise. This annual survey allows recognition of long-term trends or changes in winter population sizes and distribution. It will also help identify key wintering sites- information that is much needed to guide future conservation efforts.

Marianne Korosy reported that she and Dana - the North team - found 16 Piping Plovers, 2 of which were banded. The South team, consisting of Bob and Denise Lane and Steve Mann, found 58 Piping Plovers, 14 Snowy, 4 Wilson’s and 7 Red Knots.

Bob Lane reported the following:
During the past year, Three Rooker Bar has progressively become separated into two islands. Part of Anclote Key Preserve State Park, they are located just north of Honeymoon Island and accessible only by boat. With the tide being relatively high, we found the four species of target birds, 58 Piping Plovers, 14 Snowy Plovers, 4 Wilson’s Plovers, and 7 Red Knots. During our visit we saw a total of 42 species of birds. Some of the highlights were: plenty of shorebirds, a terrorizing Peregrine Falcon, a tamely juvenile Bald Eagle, 2 Reddish Egrets, 2 Northern Gannets, 4 American Oystercatchers, numerous American White Pelicans, 2 Sanderlings doing a territorial display, and a Willet, actually swimming in a beach pool. It was a successful and fun outing.
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