

NOV-DEC 2019

in this issue >>>

Volunteer Spotlight
Field Trips & Programs
What to Do When you Find a Bird



Conservation Through Education

The Newsletter of the Clearwater Audubon Society Vol. 91

Wing Beat

Volunteer Spotlight: Chris Hitchingham



Meet Chris Hitchingham, one of the hard-working volunteers at the Wild Raptor Sanctuary at Mocassin Lake Nature Park.

If you come to the park, you might see Chris introducing someone to one of our birds or building perches or fixing hose nozzles. Not only is Chris one of our lead volunteers, he is also a bit of a jack of all trades. In addition to primary bird care, feeding and handling, Chris fixes and builds things we need, solves problems, even pulls weeds when necessary! Chris has spent a lot of time working with Elvis, our resident black vulture. Elvis has been at the park since 1987 and is estimated to be about 33 years old. Elvis' story was submitted to the Guinness Book of World Records as the oldest living black vulture in captivity. As it turns out, there were three others older than him! Chris has a special bond with Elvis. Working with our raptors takes patience, consistency and positive reinforcement. Using food tidbits, Chris has been working on target training Elvis to go into a crate. This is an important element of training in that if we had to evacuate or bring him to the vet, having Elvis go into a crate on his own reduces stress and makes it a more rewarding experience for him.

Elvis allows Chris to play with him; he nuzzles Chris' hand and definitely sees him as one of his vulture family. Enrichment and playtime is a very important part of our captive raptors' day. They are extremely intelligent and will engage in playful activity.

Chris spends as many hours as he can at the park and he is also a full-time student at St. Petersburg College, pursuing a degree in biology with concentrations in ecology and zoology. Please stop by and visit the Sanctuary and watch Chris interact with Elvis! You can also learn about the other birds of prey that we care for. Chris' devotion and time are so appreciated by all of us here. Volunteers play the most important part in our efforts here. Thank you! We couldn't do it without Chris, and our entire team. We are here for the birds!

Also, please consider volunteering or a donation to sponsor one of our raptors.

For info, call Stephanie Anderson at 518-369-0614.

UPCOMING EVENTS >> *Field Trips & Special Events*

Monthly Meetings are held at 7pm on the first Monday of the month October-May at Moccasin Lake Nature Park 2750 Park Trail Lane, Clearwater, FL 33759. Mix-and-mingle starts at 6:30.

Program for December

December 2nd

CAS Trinidad & Tobago Report

Come hear and see the remarkable birds of Trinidad & Tobago from our very own Madeleine Bohrer.

Events

December 14th **South County Christmas Bird Count**

Can you help? - Compiler contact: Ron Smith

December 21st **North County Christmas Bird Count**

Join the team. - Compiler contact: Paul Trunk 727-430-0368.

Since the Christmas Bird Count began over a century ago, it has relied on the dedication and commitment of volunteers like you. There is a specific methodology to the CBC, and all participants must make arrangements to participate in advance with the circle compiler within an established circle, but anyone can participate. If you are a beginning birder, you will be able to join a group that includes at least one experienced birdwatcher. Just make contact with one of the compilers above to see how you can participate.

Birds of Prey at Moccasin Lake Nature Park

Come see our beautiful birds at the following December events:

December 7th - 5:30 - 10 PM

Miracle on Cleveland Street

Family-oriented, holiday event in downtown Clearwater

December 14th - Noon-2 PM

Holidays at Hogwarts

Oldsmar Library

400 Saint Petersburg Dr E. Oldsmar, FL

Harry Potter themed event.

Field Trips

December 7th

Monthly Bird Walk at Moccasin Lake Nature Park

Meet at 8:00am. Leader - Madeleine Bohrer 727-748-6885

A great way to enjoy bird watching is by going on a CAS field trip—they're organized to get you to great birding spots at a great time of year, and they're a great way to meet people. Experts and locals help you see more birds, and you'll meet other visitors who share your hobby as well.

Get ready to see more birds in the new year!

[Download the full Field Trip Brochure](#)

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Clearwater Audubon Society

<http://clearwateraudubonsociety.org/>

Supporting our community since 1959 Our Motto: Conservation through Education
For more information call us at 727-442-9140



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.

Past Issue of Wing Beat

[click issue to view](#)

SEPT-OCT 2019
in this issue >>>

Important Message
Field Trips & Programs Peek
Shooting Spotlight
NAS Strategic Plan Overview
Gadgets & Gear
Species Spotlight
FL Festival Finder
Pinellas County Birding Checklist



Conservation Through Education The Newsletter of the Clearwater Audubon Society Vol. 90 No. 2

Wing Beat

IMPORTANT MESSAGE

Welcome back! We are looking forward to a vibrant migration and have a lineup of original and exciting programs this year. Field trips were splendid last year and will shine this coming year as well.

Shorebird nesting was successful this year. If you would like to participate in stewarding next season, please reach out to us. We are having a bird handling training and park training on September 29th from 10am-Noon. If you are interested in volunteering at Moccasin Lake Nature Park with the raptors or in the Clearwater Audubon Society office please contact us at 727-798-2385 or attend the meeting. The EagleWatch meeting is on September 29th from 1pm-3pm. Please join us if you would like to monitor a nest. Both meetings will be held in the classroom.

If you have not renewed your National Audubon membership now is a good time. Christmas Bird Count is around the corner and the Great Backyard Bird Count will sneak up on us too. If you are interested in directing Community Science initiatives and a Naturalist program please call us at 727-798-2385. Must have time to spend at Moccasin Lake having fun! We have seen the return of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird to the park due to all the pollinator gardens. It has been 15 years since the last sighting by Joe Zarolinski.

In order to be diverse and inclusive, we will begin to offer additional programs at various times. Many will feature our fine feathered friends at Moccasin Lake and there will be hints of what's to come! We will be celebrating World Migratory Bird Day on October 12th, so stop by for a visit and watch the Facebook page for more detailed information. Also, watch the City of Clearwater's printed calendar, available at the front desk and the calendar displayed on park monitors.

Story telling is a powerful way to inspire conservation. Join us the third Sunday of each month at 2pm in the Clearwater Audubon Society office for *Reading with Raptors*. We will discuss a different book chosen by the group each month. In the coming year we will add Books 'n' Birds for youth selections and for on-site readings for early elementary students.

... Continued

Membership

[Membership Application](#)

Monthly Meetings

October – May

The first Monday of each month at [Moccasin Lake Nature Park](#):

Meet and Greet @ 6:30PM

Public Program @ 7:00PM

(Unless otherwise noted)

[Pinellas County Birding Checklist](#)

JOIN US FOR OUR NEXT MEETING
First Monday of the Month unless otherwise noted.



You Found a Baby Bird... Now What?

-Kim Begay

So you're out for a leisurely walk at your neighborhood park and you see a precious little songbird on the ground, alone and looking abandoned – but is he really abandoned or an orphan? How can you tell? What do you do? What are the signs to look for so you know? These are questions we hear almost daily now from well-meaning and kind-hearted individuals who have found baby birds. We're here to help you figure out what to do that's best for the young bird. It can be challenging trying to figure out the best course of action, so here are some guidelines to follow that will make it a little less difficult. First of all, it's important to determine if the bird is a **nestling** or a **fledgling**. **Nestlings** can be pink and have no feathers at all, or have downy, wispy, fluffy feathers, or have pin feathers that look like quills and have not come out of the sheath yet, or have feathers that are not fully grown out so they're not able to fly yet. Nestlings still live in the nest. They also usually are not yet able to grip onto your finger or a perch and cling on strongly. Here are some examples of nestlings.



Fledglings are usually found hopping on the ground and making short flights into low bushes or shrubs, have feathers that are more developed, longer tail feathers, and look like smaller versions of the adults they will become. Fledglings are learning how to fly and are supposed to be out of the nest and exploring their surroundings. They have not been abandoned by their parents, although it may seem like they have been because you may not see the parents right away, but rest assured the parents (at least one of them) is watching their young one from a distance and usually will still fly down to feed them while they're learning how to fly. They usually are strong enough to perch on a branch. If they are uninjured and there are no dangers such as predators in the area or are not next to a busy street, they usually do not need to be picked up or caught and brought in for rehab! The fledging process is a normal part of a young bird growing up, leaving the nest, learning how to fly and become independent. Some songbirds, such as Carolina wrens, typically fledge in one to two days, while other species take a week or two. Yes, this can be a vulnerable time for them, but it's a stage they all must go through. Here are some examples of fledglings.



Now that you know the difference between a nestling and a fledgling you have a better idea what to do. If you've found a **nestling**, ask yourself these questions:

1. Does it look injured? Are the wings drooping unevenly? Is it weak or shivering? Does it look like it's been attacked by a predator, such as a cat or a dog? Do you see any blood or protruding bones? If so, call a licensed/permitted wildlife rehabilitator such as Owl's Nest Sanctuary for Wildlife. We will provide skilled and appropriate care and take the bird to an avian veterinarian if it's needed.
2. If the bird has been found on the ground with no nesting material around it, it's likely it fell or has been displaced from the nest. If it looks healthy and not injured, then you can place it back in its nest if you can locate it. Look above and in the area where you found the bird and see if you can locate a nest. Remember that some birds nest in small spaces such as vent openings, wreaths on doors, and other atypical places besides trees or bushes. If you can locate the nest and access it safely, you can return the baby to the nest. ***It is not true that if a human has touched a baby bird the parents will reject it! They will gladly accept their baby back!*** When placing the bird back in the nest, make sure the other baby birds in the nest look like the same species as the one you are re-nesting. Securely tuck it in the nest next to its siblings in an upright position.
3. Now that you've re-nested the baby bird, you'll have to monitor it from a distance to ensure the parent(s) are returning to the nest to care for it. Monitor for 45 minutes to an hour from a distance so the parents will feel it is safe for them to return.
4. If you're not able to locate the original nest, are unable to reach the nest, or the parents don't return to the nest within an hour, please contact a wildlife rehabilitator for advice and assistance.
5. If you have found a portion of a nest or a whole nest on the ground or in a place where a nest has fallen, you can place the intact original nest or a portion of the nest in a substitute nest and place it back in the nest tree or a tree close to the nest tree. Follow these steps to do so:
 - Use a round plastic container like a margarine tub and poke holes in the bottom to allow for drainage, or you can use a berry basket. Pack the original nest or whatever nesting material you found into the bottom of the container, making the sides higher and the middle lower, to create a nest bowl. If you don't have any nesting material, use **dry** grass to create a new nest.
 - Use wire or long tie wraps and thread them through one hole and out the other in the bottom of the container to secure the substitute nest in the original location where the nest used to be, or as nearby as possible. Make sure the nest is not in direct sunlight and is at least partially sheltered from rain, such as under the canopy of a tree.
 - Now that you've placed the substitute nest, you'll have to monitor it from a distance to ensure the parent(s) are returning to the nest to care for the nestlings. Monitor for 45 minutes to an hour from a distance so the parents will feel it is safe for them to return. If they do not return within this time, call a wildlife rehabilitator for assistance.

****Note**** Please keep the nestling(s) warm while you are trying to locate the nest or while you're placing a substitute nest. You can place it in a small cardboard box with air holes and lined with a t-shirt or small towel and place half of the box on a heating pad set to warm or low. Nestlings cannot regulate their own body temperature and need to be kept warm.

If you've found a **fledgling**, ask yourself these questions:

1. Does it look injured? Are the wings drooping unevenly? Is it weak or shivering? Does it look like it's been attacked by a predator, such as a cat or a dog? Do you see any blood or protruding bones? If so, call a licensed/permitted wildlife rehabilitator such as Owl's Nest Sanctuary for Wildlife. We will provide skilled and appropriate care and take the bird to an avian veterinarian if it's needed.
2. If the bird looks healthy, is it in danger from predators, such as cats, dogs, crows, hawks, et cetera? Is it near a hazard, such as a busy street or construction site? If so and it's in immediate danger, you can catch the bird and place it in a cardboard box with air holes, lined with a t-shirt or small towel. Close the lid and tape it shut with small cracks to allow for some air flow. You can also place an upside-down cardboard box or other container with air holes over the bird and keep it safe that way. Then call a licensed wildlife rehabilitator for further advice.
3. Do you see the parents coming down to feed it? Is it near bushes or low trees so it can hop or fly into them to retreat to safety? If so, this is normal behavior and the bird is just doing what it normally does during the fledging process. If the bird is not in a bush or low tree, you can gently pick up the bird and place him in one. The bird is fine, leave the area and let the parents care for it.

Remember, normal behavior for a fledgling is for them to be on the ground walking and hopping around, and making short flights into bushes or low trees.

WHY IT'S NOT A GOOD IDEA TO RAISE A BABY BIRD YOURSELF

1. While we understand that most people have good intentions when they decide to raise a baby bird they've found themselves, know that it is **illegal** to keep and raise a wild baby bird. Almost all wild birds are protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which makes it illegal for anyone to take, possess, import, export, transport, sell, purchase, barter, or offer for sale, purchase, or barter, any migratory bird, or the parts, nests, or eggs of such a bird except under the terms of a valid permit issued pursuant to Federal regulations. You can go here to see the list of protected species:
<http://www.fws.gov/birds/policies-and-regulations/laws-legislations/migratory-bird-treaty-act.php>
2. Different species of baby birds require different and very specific diets. If baby birds are not fed the appropriate diet, in other words, the correct ratio of protein to carbohydrates via the appropriate foods, such as insects and fruit, etc., they can develop a debilitating condition known as metabolic bone disease, which makes their bones brittle and easy to fracture.
3. Baby birds need to learn natural behavior from their parents. Being raised in captivity by a person without the proper training and expertise will most likely leave a bird imprinted or habituated on humans, robbing the bird of a normal life in the wild, as it will not know how to act like the species it is, having never learned from another of their own kind. It will be vulnerable to predation, as it has not learned alerting behavior from their parents.
4. Young birds need to learn social skills of their species by being with others of their kind. Being raised in captivity alone by an unqualified person deprives them of this. Wildlife rehabilitators usually have other species of the same kind, which provides a social setting for the youngsters.
5. Federal and state-licensed wildlife rehabilitators have thousands of hours of training on how to specifically care for and raise baby birds of all kinds. Getting a baby bird to a wildlife rehabber is the best way to ensure the bird

will be raised in a healthy manner, fed the proper diet, be given the proper socialization and survival skills necessary for life in the wild, and to ensure the bird will be released in a safe and appropriate habitat.

Some Basic Do's and Don'ts

1. Don't give baby birds water! Baby birds get all the moisture and hydration they need from the food they eat, such as moist, juicy bugs or berries that their parents feed them. They haven't developed the coordination to swallow thin liquids and can aspirate easily if given water. Most times aspiration leads to death.
2. Don't feed baby birds bread or milk! Birds are not mammals and do not require milk. Also, bread is not a part of their diet. Think about what they eat in the wild. They never eat bread or drink milk! It's best not to give a baby bird any liquid or food until it's in the hands of a wildlife rehabilitator.
3. Don't excessively handle baby birds. Chances are they are frightened and stressed if they've fallen from their nest, been attacked by a predator, or separated from their parents, and handling them more than necessary before they get to a wildlife rehabilitator puts undue stress on them.
4. If you're in doubt about what to do if you find a baby bird, please call a licensed wildlife rehabilitator for advice and assistance!

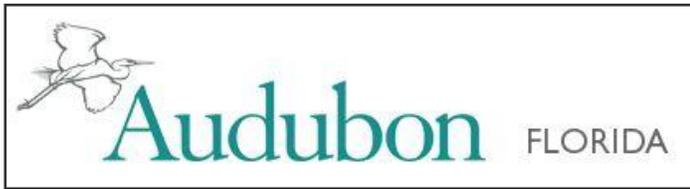
If you find any sick, injured, or suspected orphaned wildlife we would like to remind you to give us or another ***permitted rehabilitator*** a call.



Kim Begay is Clearwater Audubon's Vice President of Conservation. If you would like more information about how you can help make a difference, please email her at kimbegay@gmail.com

We can protect birds and the places they call home — as long as we have people like you who will help.
Volunteer opportunities are available.

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