



Wing Beat

Conservation Through Education
The Newsletter of the Clearwater Audubon Society
Jan-Feb 2024 Vol. 116

Bird More in 2024

We all make at least one resolution at the beginning of a new year. Examples may include exercising more, learning new things, meeting new people, etc. Well, that's birding.

Benefits? Buckle up, birders:

- **Stress Slayer:** Worries? Leave them for the owls to handle. Studies show that a dose of nature, birdsongs included, lowers stress hormones and boosts your mood. Imagine: you, calm and collected, while pigeons argue over crumbs.
- **Nature's Gym:** No treadmills, just fresh air and footpaths. Birdwatching gets you moving, breathing deeply, and maybe even doing a bit of duck-waddling imitation (bonus points for sound effects).
- **Mindfulness Masterclass:** Forget meditation apps, watch a hummingbird hover. Focus on the intricate details of feathers, the flash of wings against sunlight, and the sheer audacity of a grackle stealing your croissant. Go further- journal the experience.
- **Citizen Science Superstars:** Every bird sighting contributes to research and conservation efforts. You, my friend, could be the key to saving the polka-dotted puffbird (ebird.org).

Beyond binoculars, here's how to feather your nest of birding fun:

- **Themed Twists:** Turn it into a scavenger hunt for specific colors, beak shapes, or bird families. Bonus points for the most creative bird calls.
- **Backyard Bonanza:** Make your home a bird haven with feeders, birdbaths, and native plants. Then, sit back and watch the feathered reality show unfold.
- **Birding Buddies:** Grab a friend or family member and make it a social spree. Laughter guaranteed, especially when you both try to identify a blurry blob in the bushes.

And yes, humor is a vital part of birding:

- Imagine explaining to your boss why you're late because a cardinal with a particularly dramatic song held you hostage.
- Picture the existential crisis you'll trigger in a pigeon by wearing a mirrored hat.

So, this New Year, forget the fads and embrace the feathers.. Remember, it's not just about the birds, it's about the birdwatcher within you waiting to take flight.

Happy birding (and Happy New Year!)

UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

Most trips are led by volunteer Clearwater Audubon Society leaders. Unless otherwise indicated, they are free and open to the public. Please arrive 15 minutes prior to the scheduled meet time designated

January 6th Monthly Bird Outing at Moccasin Lake Nature Park [add to calendar](#)

Meet at 8:00am Accessible with assistance 

Leader - Paul Trunk 727-430-0368

January 13th Myakka River State Park [add to calendar](#)

Meet at the Walmart at 2677 Roosevelt Blvd. at 7:30am. Carpooling, bring gas, \$\$ and lunch. Myakka State Park 13208 State Road 72 Sarasota 34241.

Guest Leader - Holley Short (352) 455-8993

January 20th Roosevelt Wetlands [add to calendar](#)

Meet at the kiosk in the parking lot at 8:00am. Corner of 110th Avenue & 43rd Street.

Leader - Steve Aversa 727-218-7938

January 27th Brooker Creek Preserve [add to calendar](#)

Meet at the kiosk in the parking lot at 8:00am


Leader - John Swenfurth (813) 390-4734

February 3rd RAPTOR FEST

Boyd Hill Nature Park, St. Petersburg 10am - 4pm Great Fun for the entire family.

www.raptorfest.org

February 3rd Monthly Bird Outing at Moccasin Lake Nature Park [add to calendar](#)

Meet at 8:00am Accessible with assistance 

Leader - Cuneyt Yilmaz 727-657-0803

February 17th Largo Central Park Nature Preserve [add to calendar](#)

Meet at 8:00am at the park at 150 Highland Ave N, Largo, 33770.

Leader Steve Aversa 727-218-7938

February 24th Wall Springs Park & Crystal Beach Park [add to calendar](#)

Meet at 8:00 am at 3725 De Soto Blvd, Palm Harbor 34683 in the south parking lot. 2nd Crystal Beach Ave. Palm Harbor

Leader - Bill Kaempfer (303) 717-5063

CBC REPORT

The 48th annual North Pinellas Christmas Bird Count was held on December 23, 2023. Over 2,000 CBCs, a National Audubon sponsored event dating back to 1899, are conducted all over North America every year. Each count is held in a "count circle" 15 miles in diameter on a date between December 14th and January 5th. Locally, our count covers just about all of Pinellas County north of Gulf-to-Bay including most of our local birding gems like Honeymoon Island, Brooker Creek Preserve, and John Chesnut Park.

With such great birding spots and lots of talented birders participating, North Pinellas is typically in the top 30 counts in the US in terms of the number of species reported. Over the last 8 years, our species total has been in the narrow range of 156 to 163 species. This year we were right in the middle with **159** species reported.

Over the years, 223 species have been recorded on the count. No new species were found this year. 103 species have been seen on each of the previous counts, and we saw all of them again this year.



Most of you could easily guess our most abundant species—Fish Crow with 1,939 counted. The rest of the top five includes White Ibis (1,398), American Robin (1,334), Lesser Scaup (932), and Yellow-rumped Warbler (860). We also had some exciting rarities including Barn Owl, Snow Goose, King Rail, and Summer Tanager.

Paul Rowe took this Red-tailed Hawk picture at Possum Branch during the CBC

While 159 is about average, the number of individual birds reported, 19,684 was about 25 percent lower than the 2022 total. If you want to see the rest of the species, please visit the following link:

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/185129>

Bill Kaempfer and Cuneyt Yilmaz are co-compilers of the North Pinellas Christmas Bird Count. It took 59 birders in about 20 groups to find all these birds. Some groups were out in the field for 10 or 11 hours on count day.

Congratulations, and our thanks, to the following participants:

Jim McGinity	Sue Shook	Ron Buening
Christina Maurice	Stan Shook	Lauri Lew
Eva Bailey	Mardy Hornsby	Steve Aversa
Gene Ellis	Cy Hornsby	Jake Street
Paul Trunk	Bob Lane	Merle Hubbard
Dawn Napolitano	Denise Lane	Sadie Hubbard
Pam Graber	Mia Majetschak	Bill Suba
Don Fraser	Bill Pranty	Alexa Dedoinnis
John Swenfurth	Madeleine Bohrer	Julie Clark
Tom Bisco	Rose Joslin	Bryant Pomrenke
Lillian Kenney	Ann Kramer	Paul Rowe
Carl Shavers	Bill Scott	Nancy Okeefe
Anne Ruben	Debbie Scott	John Laver
Vincent Palmer	Brett Hoffman	Jim Hoover
Brad Huber	Ron Smith	Louise Roy
Mary Anne McLean	Eric Plage	Eva Renfroe
Craig Liddle	Peter Plage	Cecile Yarrow
Janette Liddle	JoAnna Clayton	Dave Bowman
Kate Howard	Gerry Gibson	

PROGRAMS CALENDAR

Monthly meetings are held at Moccasin Lake Nature Park the 1st Monday of the month (unless a holiday) from October to May. Meet & Greet at 6:30PM, Program begins at 7PM. View our previous programs on our [YouTube](#) channel.

MONTH	SPEAKER	DETAILS
Jan 8 @ 7PM	Paul Trunk Add to calendar	Birding Arizona <p>Overall, Arizona’s species list of around 550 is the highest of any state without an ocean coastline. Paul Trunk will share his recent birding trip with species and hotspots to encourage you to plan your next trip.</p>
Feb 5 @ 7PM	Jim McGinity Add to calendar	The Florida Young Birders Club <p>Jim McGinity has a strong interest in educating the next generation of bird conservationists. He formed the YBC with support from local Audubon chapters and the Florida Ornithological Society (FOS) to begin laying the foundation for expanding the Florida Young Birders Club state-wide. Jim, along with a few members, will share the experiences of this vibrant young group and share their passion.</p> <p>Special report from FYBC mom, Rachael Woodams, about her CAS Educator Scholarship trip to Hog Island’s Educator’s Camp. She is an elementary teacher and Project FeederWatch participant.</p>

Would you like to make a larger impact? Consider joining the Clearwater Audubon Society Board of Directors as our Outreach Chair. [Email Lynn Sumerson if you are interested.](#)

Outreach/ Programs Chair: Research and schedule General Meeting Programs (GMPs) of greatest interest to CAS members which fulfill the CAS purpose; prepare information for inclusion in the CAS annual Field Trip & Program Brochure; coordinate information with Field Trip, Website and Newsletter Chairs for publication; contact each presenter one month prior to scheduled program to coordinate details; schedule board dinner before presentation; introduce presenter at meeting; research and recommend suggestions for future GMPs.

Why Birders Should Love Seagrass

-Jessica Hughes, Conservation Committee

Seagrasses are flowering plants found in shallow marine environments. They form underwater meadows that act as incredible carbon sinks while providing food and habitat to a host of animals (Kennedy & Björk, 2009). In Florida, the three most common seagrass species are turtle grass (*Thalassia testudinum*), shoal grass (*Halodule wrightii*), and manatee grass (*Syringodium filiforme*). While seagrasses might not seem like the most interesting organisms, they help humans and birds in some amazing ways.



Photos by J. Hughes (2022). From left to right: *T. testudinum*, *H. wrightii*, *S. filiforme*.

First, seagrasses increase water quality and clarity by reducing the water's movement. Without seagrass meadows, those waters would appear muddy and contain excess nutrients (Moore, 2009). Naturally, this has commercial and recreational benefits. Additionally, seagrasses provide habitat for commercially important fish species (Jackson et al., 2001). Since seafood is a large part of many people's diets worldwide, providing environments for fish to live and reproduce is crucial. Furthermore, seagrass meadows have a collection of roots under the sediment which drastically reduces coastal erosion (Christianen et al., 2013). In a state where so much development is situated along the coastline, reducing erosion is necessary for our own communities.

If this is not incentive enough to protect seagrass meadows, birders should know that seagrasses are important to the health of many bird populations. Interestingly, not only do sea turtles and manatees feed directly on seagrasses – but so do Brant Geese (*Branta bernicla*), Teal (*Anas crecca*), and Widgeons (*Anas penelope*) (Reynolds, n.d.; Unsworth & Butterworth, 2021). Many birds (such as cormorants and herons) feed on the invertebrates and fish commonly found living in seagrasses. Moreover, seagrass meadows act as nurseries for juvenile fish which become pelagic as adults and so, birds that feed far away from seagrass meadows still reap their rewards (Unsworth & Butterworth, 2021).

Unfortunately, seagrass meadows face many threats. Dredging, boating, and development all severely damage seagrass beds. In Florida, that damage has been approximated to 70,000 ha (Kenworthy et al., 2018). Additionally, sewage and agricultural runoff can increase algal blooms which darkens the water and reduces the sunlight available for photosynthesis (Carlson Jr et al., 2010). Climate change is a large threat which encompasses many factors which affect the health of seagrasses. In short, climate change has altered water temperature, salinity, and dissolved carbon dioxide (Short & Neckles, 1999). The rapid change of these environmental conditions means seagrass species might not be able to adapt quick enough, leading to their depletion.

These are not easy problems to tackle. However, one way to restore seagrass meadows is with the help of birds! Not only are seagrasses incredibly valuable to birds, but birds can help enrich seagrass beds. On barrier islands in Florida Bay, areas with nesting piscivorous bird colonies increase the crop and number of seagrass species present (Powell et al., 1991). It is thought that this is due to extra available nutrients due to high defecation levels in a concentrated area (Powell et al., 1991). In fact, experts have utilized wild bird defecation in seagrass bed restoration projects (Kenworthy et al., 2018). Transplants of *H. wrightii* fertilized bird feces proved to significantly increase the coverage of seagrass compared to unfertilized transplants (Kenworthy et al., 2018). *H. wrightii* that grows in phosphorus low sediment has been shown to display an increased growth rate when phosphorus-rich feces produced by birds is introduced. Experts have realized that placing perches in seagrass meadows may increase the presence of feces

expelled by birds, and thus have a positive impact on seagrass biomass (Unsworth & Butterworth, 2021).

In sum, birds and seagrasses are connected in a beautiful way. For marine environments to thrive, birds and seagrasses must be protected. While healthy ecosystems have a positive impact on humans, the reverse may not be true. Therefore, it is up to us birders to remember that every living thing is connected and worthy of protection for the good of birds and humans alike.

References

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COMMUNITY EVENTS



Birds & Brews

with Jim McGinity
January 30th @ 7PM

Calling all bird enthusiasts! Join us for an evening of bird talk and beer at **Caledonia Brewing in Dunedin!**

We're excited to host a special event for bird lovers of all levels of experience. Jim McGinity will be discussing the local bird population, migration patterns, and conservation efforts through his banding stations.

At the talk, you can enjoy a delicious selection of craft beers from Caledonia Brewing. We'll also have snacks and non-alcoholic beverages available.

BIRDS & BREWS

LEARN ABOUT BIRDS WITH
JIM MCGINITY

JAN
30th
2024

7PM | TUESDAY
BRING A FRIEND

@ CALEDONIA
BREWING

Jungle Book Movie, Day of Stories at Moccasin lake!

Saturday, February 3, 2024!

Join us for a day of crafts, fun, food & music at Moccasin Lake Nature Park from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.!

Suzanne & Jim Concert on Moccasin Stage starts at 3 p.m.

The Jungle Book (2016) movie starts at 6 p.m. Bring your lawn chair from home!

Annie Get Your Bun & Ice Bar food and beverage vendors will be onsite.

2750 Park Trail Lane, Clearwater
727-562-4315, ext. 1

CLEARWATER
MOCCASIN LAKE NATURE PARK



SAVE THE DATE Saturday, Feb 3, 2024 | 10:00 am - 4:00 pm

Join us for the 10th Annual Raptor Fest at Boyd Hill Nature Preserve! FREE ADMISSION! Watch trained raptors in free flight, learn about Florida’s native raptor species, get a photo with live birds of prey, learn from local environmental exhibitors, enjoy activities for children & families, take a bird walk and much more!



With a grateful heart, we thank you for taking flight with our conservation efforts! Your generosity helps us soar towards a world where birds flourish.

Sun, Sand, and Sustainability: Why Conservation Matters in Pinellas County

-Meichelle Long

Nestled between the shimmering Gulf of Mexico and the serene Tampa Bay, Pinellas County boasts pristine beaches, vibrant coral reefs, and lush mangrove forests. But this coastal paradise faces constant threats, from rising sea levels to habitat loss. That's where conservation efforts become more than just words – they become the lifeblood of preserving Pinellas County's unique natural character.

Why Conservation Matters:

- Protecting our precious water: Pinellas County relies on a delicate balance of freshwater and saltwater. Conservation efforts, like reducing lawn watering and using native plants, ensure our drinking water supply and protect the marine ecosystems that draw tourists and sustain local food chains.
- Safeguarding endangered species: From the playful manatees basking in our waterways to the elusive Florida scrub jay flitting through our forests, Pinellas County shelters a breathtaking array of unique animals. Conservation helps prevent extinction and maintain the intricate web of life that supports our entire ecosystem.
- Building resilient communities: Climate change and unpredictable weather patterns pose significant challenges to coastal communities. By restoring natural habitats like wetlands and barrier islands, we're not just protecting wildlife, but also building natural buffers against storms and floods, safeguarding our cities and homes.
- Providing recreational opportunities: Nature isn't just something to look at; it's something to experience. Conservation ensures we have pristine beaches for swimming, serene trails for hiking, and calm waters for paddling. A healthy environment is a playground for both residents and visitors.

Become a Conservation Champion:

The good news is, everyone can play a role in protecting Pinellas County's beauty and biodiversity. **Get involved. Giving back can improve your physical and mental health — and might even make you live longer.** Here are a few ways you can get involved:

- Be a Water Wise Warrior: Fix leaky faucets, install water-efficient appliances, and utilize native plants that require less watering.
- Volunteer Your Time (Not just for Clearwater Audubon): Join other local conservation organizations like the Friends of the Pinellas County Parks or the Tampa Bay Estuary Program to help restore habitats and remove invasive species.
- Support Environmentally Conscious Businesses: Choose companies committed to sustainability and responsible consumption. Look for local food producers and eco-friendly products.
- Educate Yourself and Others: Learn about the challenges facing Pinellas County's environment and share your knowledge with friends and family. Organize a beach cleanup or host a neighborhood meeting about sustainable living.
- Speak Up for the Environment: Advocate for strong environmental policies and support elected officials who champion conservation efforts.

Pinellas County isn't just a place we live; it's a vibrant ecosystem we have the privilege to share with countless species. By embracing conservation, we not only protect this natural paradise for future generations, but also invest in our own health, well-being, and economic prosperity. Let's join hands and ensure that the sun, sand, and sustainability continue to define Pinellas County for years to come.

Remember, even small actions can have a big impact. Start your conservation journey today, and become a champion for the future of Pinellas County!

Your Clearwater Audubon Society Board

Executive Committee:

John Hood
Lynn Sumerson
Dale Goebel
Méichelle Long
Cuneyt Yilmaz

Committee Chairs:

Conservation Projects: Dana Kerstein
Field Trips: Dale Goebel
Communication/Media: **Position Available**
Membership: Cuneyt Yilmaz
Newsletter/Webmaster: Méichelle Long
Community Outreach: Lynn Sumerson

Officers:

VP Conservation: Kim Begay
Treasurer: Deborah Larkin
Secretary: Stephanie Hall

Board Member at Large:

Mardy Hornsby
Diane Ives, Don Peccia
IP President: John Hood

Sub-Committees:

CBC: Bill Kaempfer
Eagle Watch: Louise Roy
Finance: Don Peccia

Join the Board or a Committee

Becoming a member of a nonprofit organization's board can be a meaningful way to explore how your experience and expertise can be applied in the nonprofit sector at the governance level, and ultimately, how your experience and expertise can help advance a nonprofit organization's social impact. Please take a few moments to read Audubon's statement of [Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging](#) and the [Board Member Expectations](#). Board members meet on the last Monday of each month. Monthly general membership meetings (open to the public) are the first Monday of the month unless otherwise noted. To view a list of available positions on the board or on a committee, please view [this document](#). Complete the [Board Interest Survey](#) [here](#).

Clearwater Audubon Society, Inc.

P.O. Box 97 Clearwater Florida 33757 EIN 59-6177460
<http://clearwateraudubonsociety.org/>
Supporting our community since 1959

Our Motto: Conservation through Education

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.

[Membership Information](#)



[VISIT OUR WEBSITE](#)



CLEARWATER AUDUBON

COMING



SOON
SPRING 2024

Special announcement at the
January 8th Program

Partnering Organizations



- [Audubon Florida](#)
- [St. Petersburg Audubon Society](#)
- [Tampa Audubon Society](#)
- [Important Bird Areas in Florida](#)



- [Great Florida Birding Trail](#)
- [Florida Ornithological Society](#)
- [Florida Avian Conservation](#)



- [Moccasin Lake Nature Park](#)
- [Moccasin Lake Raptor Sanctuary](#)
- [Friends of Moccasin Lake](#)



- [Pinellas Chapter FNPS](#)
- [Florida Herb Society](#)
- [Safety Harbor Garden Club](#)
- [Florida Botanical Gardens](#)



- [Friends of Dunedin Hammock](#)
- [Friends of Brooker Creek Preserve](#)
- [Suncoast Herpetological Society, Inc.](#)
- [Tampa Bay Turtle & Tortoise Society](#)
- [Friends in Focus Photography Club](#)
- [Florida Young Birder's Club & Florida Avian Conservation](#)

