

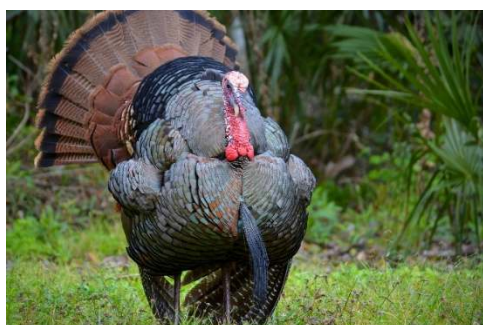


Sun City Center Audubon Club

NOVEMBER 2026

President's Corner

**HAPPY THANKSGIVING
EVERYONE!!!!**



Osceola Turkey

The Costa Rica trip has been cancelled per the travel company, due to lack of participants.

We will not be having a meeting on December 5. We will instead be participating in the golf cart parade and other CA activities that day. Please volunteer to help with decorating the golf cart.

Trail day is October 30, if you would like to help please get in touch with Melanie Higgins at melaniephiggins@gmail.com or 813-625-1271.

If you would like to serve on the board of directors for SCC Audubon, please let me know.

We have a new editor for the newsletter; it is Melanie Higgins. Much thanks to Denise Rosen for all the years she edited our newsletter.

We will be announcing our capital campaign for the trail expansion and bridge at the November meeting.

Hope to see everyone on **November 7 at 9:30 in the Florida Room.**

Pam Viner, President

Reminder for Volunteers

If you are helping with setting up, please be at the Florida Room by 8:30am.

If you are helping at a table, (sign in, donations, dues) please arrive by 8:50am.

Looking forward to seeing all of you on November 7th.

Board of Directors

President	Pam Kie Viner
Vice President	Sheri Cameron
Treasurer	George Viner
Secretary	Elizabeth Giles
At Large	Linda Floyd
At Large	Patsie Ginley
At Large	Melanie Higgins

Committee Chairs

Field Trips	Sabine Prather
Programs	Sheri Cameron
Membership	Joanie Swartz
Newsletter, Conservation	Melanie Higgins
Publicity	John Perian
Historian	Clara Clancy
Merchandise	Laura Butler
Refreshments	Beverly Haverkamp
Master Birder	Ray Webb

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

MONTHLY MEETING NOVEMBER 7, 2026

Our **November 7th** meeting will feature a program on snakes of Florida. Serena Gulland, Wildlife Assistance Biologist, Wildlife Impact Management Section, Division of Habitat and Species Conservation, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, will enlighten us on the variety of species that inhabit Florida and teach us how to appreciate their contribution to the ecosystem.



In addition, Melanie Higgins will give a brief update on bluebirds and a short presentation on the progress of the Nature Trail north extension.

DECEMBER 5th MEETING CANCELLED – GOLF CART PARADE, HERE WE COME!

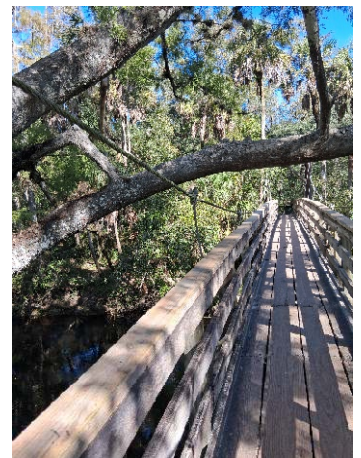
If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. Since our December meeting has historically been on the same date as the SCCA Golf Cart Parade, this year we have opted to join in the fun. Ann Fenimore has generously offered up her golf cart, but we need help and decorations. If you have any cotton batting, garland, bows, ribbon, wrapping paper or other Christmas decorations, please contact Pam (518 322-9590) or Melanie (813 625-1271) and we will pick them up. In addition, if you have experience decorating a golf cart and want to help, please call. Any winnings will be added to the trail fund.

And we'll need you to cheer us on! Who knows? That life sized cardinal may come out of hiding.....

FIELD TRIPS GALORE

The SCC Audubon Club had our October trip on Wednesday, October 21st. Four of us left from Community Hall to explore Hillsborough River State Park in Thonotosassa. We walked on the Rapids trail and did a loop back through the picnic area to the parking lot. There are only two river rapids in Florida; this park has Class II rapids and Big Shoals State Park in White Springs has Class III rapids. They're something to see.

We saw a few birds and heard several. We saw an Anhinga in the river, a Red-bellied Woodpecker right by the trail, and a Tufted Titmouse. We heard many Gray Catbirds, a Northern Cardinal, Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher, Pileated Woodpecker, and Carolina Wren. We also encountered many mosquitoes, unfortunately. Nevertheless, this state park is lovely, with a large picnic area and playground, many nice trails, and the Hillsborough River running through it.



Next month, the club will be enjoying Se7en Wetlands in Lakeland, Florida. Se7en Wetlands is a constructed wetland treatment system, which provides tertiary treatment, or final polishing, for all of Lakeland's wastewater. Located south of Lakeland, Se7en Wetlands has over 1,600 acres of marshes, swamps, uplands, and lakes. Se7en

Wetlands water connects to the North Prong of the Alafia River, which flows directly to Tampa Bay. Se7en Wetlands also provides water for Tampa Electric Company's Polk Power Station. In addition to the treatment provided, Se7en Wetlands boasts an outstanding and diverse community of plant and animal species.

We'll be on the Wetland Wagon, an open air vehicle, from 9 AM to 11 AM on Wednesday, November 18th. There's room for 20 people. Be prepared for sun, but the weather should be pleasant. We'll go for lunch in the area after the tour.

In December, stay tuned for a trip to Harry Leu Gardens in Orlando. If we get enough people, we can lease a bus. We're looking at the week of the 7th or 14th of December, when the gardens will be decorated for the holidays.



November

Sabine Prather
Marjorie Parker
Richard Parker
Ann Fenimore
Nancy Stanton
Veronica Harris
Dave Greise
Lauralei Collier
Janice Wohlrab

Looking forward to seeing everyone at the next meeting!

Sabine Prather, Field Trip Coordinator



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS! *(October 2026)*

Kathy Bizzano
Charles Davanzo
Larry Francis
Roseann Francis
Janette Ulics
Phil Prather
Richard Dombrow
Melissa Carter
Nancy Alguire

SCC AUDUBON CLUB IS RAISING FUNDS FOR THE EXPANSION OF ITS WEST CAMP NATURE TRAIL

By John Perian and Melanie Higgins

Few if any places in America offer free handouts anymore. These days, everything is more expensive than it was even five years ago. The same applies to Florida and Sun City Center's Audubon Club and Community Association. The two groups are working together to construct a trail extension on the north side of the canal that bisects the community's existing West Campus Nature Trails acreage. But, like everything else in life that's worthwhile, it costs a lot of money. The current budget for the trail expansion is approximately \$50,000. It's broken down as follows:

- Permitting: \$10,000
- Trail Construction, including fine grading: \$8,000
- Access Road for Bridge construction: \$2,000
- Bridge construction: \$20,000
- Contingency: \$10,000

The cost of Permitting has been covered with existing grant funds. Trail construction and the access road have been covered with a \$10,000 grant from TECO, that the Club applied for and was granted earlier this year.

According to Melanie Higgins, Audubon Conservation Committee Chair who has been helping coordinate funding and plans for the project, "We are currently submitting grants and soliciting donations to cover the \$20,000 cost to build an 8-foot-wide bridge that will span an 18-foot-wide ditch crossing that leads to a picnic area at the end of the new 1/3 mile trail."

The existing south 16 acres of groomed West Campus Nature Trails is located off West Del Webb Boulevard, between Seton Hall and Vincennes Drive. It's just west of North Lake.

The Nelson and Mollie Allen SCC Audubon Club Fund supports the continued mission of the club, to promote an understanding of and an interest in all areas of wildlife, not just the bird species here. The Fund also provides financial support for



Finished Bridge Concept

improvements to the SCC Nature Trails. It also helps to further the cause of conserving the area's natural resources, for the benefit of today's SCC residents and for posterity.

The Allen Fund was established in 2023. It's part of the Community Foundation of Tampa Bay, that connects donors, nonprofits and community leaders, to support charitable needs across the Tampa Bay region.

Founded in 1990, the CFTB is a public charity that serves Hillsborough, Pinellas, Pasco, Hernando and Citrus Counties. It has committed more than \$1 Billion in total philanthropic support. It also manages assets to sustain long-term regional donations.

Although the project to develop the property north of the existing West Campus Nature Trail has received grant money to pay for a portion of the improvement and grooming of that side of the Trail, additional funding is sorely needed.

Residents of SCC and Kings Point, who would like to make a minimum **tax-deductible** donation of \$25 or more, can do so securely online, by making their contribution to the Nelson and Mollie Allen SCC Audubon Club Fund. To donate, please contact the Community Foundation Tampa Bay at portalhelp@cftampabay.org, or call 727-777-5858 or contact the main office in Tampa at 813-282-1975.



Existing (yellow), New Trail (green)

If you would like to see an example of what your investment will do, visit the existing south 16 acres of groomed West Campus Nature Trail located off West Del Webb Boulevard, between Seton Hall and

Vincennes Drive. It's just across the street west of North Lake. Limited Golf Cart parking is available near the trail head entrance. If the golf cart parking is full, all vehicles must park on West Del Webb Boulevard. A large sign in front of the Trail Head announces its location and can be seen from West Del Webb Boulevard.

The property was first identified by the now defunct SCC Hiking Club many years ago. The original idea was to create a trail for residents of SCC and Kings Point hikers to enjoy, so they could have a natural oasis in the community, to observe and savor the native Florida flora and fauna in a preserved Green Space that was close by.

The Audubon Club became stewards of the trails in 2015. It is currently managed by the club's Conservation Committee. They and other members of the club have volunteered hundreds of hours of time and energy to keep the Trail accessible.

In addition, the Audubon Club was successful in obtaining two \$20,000 grants from the Environmental Protection Commission of Hillsborough County, to restore both parcels by removing exotic vegetation that threatened native flora. The Audubon Club and the SCCCA split the cost of yearly maintenance on the properties. The ongoing cost amounts to about \$5,000 a year.

The 37 acres of existing and planned Nature Trail habitat includes stately Live Oaks, some of which are more than 200 years old. Also growing alongside the Oaks are Longleaf and Slash Pines, Saw Palmettos, Bald and Pond Cypress Trees, Sabal Palms, Yaupon Holly, Maypop Vines, American Beautyberry, Virginia Creeper, Common Elderberry, Inkberry and other plants.



Entrance to Trailhead

Some of the fauna (critters) that call the Nature Trail home include anoles (lizards), aquatic turtles, racoons, opossums, an occasional coyote, fox or bobcat, medium sized or smaller, immature alligators, non-venomous snakes like the Southern Black Racer, Southern Ring Necked, Yellow Rat and Corn Snakes, water snakes, specialized pollinators like butterflies, bees and wasps.

Various bird species like the red bellied and pileated woodpeckers, ospreys and red shouldered hawks, herons, cardinals, bluejays, grackles, anhinga's, wood ducks and whistling ducks, and warblers also utilize the site.

Are there poisonous plants, venomous snakes or biting insects along the Nature Trail? Could be. This IS South Florida, so there is always the potential of stumbling upon something toxic or venomous in the environment. This is the reason the Audubon Club suggests that visitors to the Trail wear appropriate clothing.

Long Pants, a long-sleeved shirt, closed toe walking/hiking shoes, socks with pants tucked inside, a sun hat, sunglasses, and insect repellent are highly recommended. And, anyone who has a balance or ambulation issue should seriously

consider a good walking staff or cane for support, if needed.

Although the trails are kept groomed throughout the year, it's best to stay vigilant while walking. Stop when you hear or notice a bird, animal or reptile. Don't continue walking while your eyes are focused up in the tree canopies. You could trip on an exposed tree root. Or you could accidentally step on an unsuspecting reptile sunning itself on or near the trail path.

Enjoy your time on the trail, feel your heartrate slow down, and your blood pressure drop. The sights, smells and the quiet of nature are the perfect accompaniment to walking meditation.



Peace

RECAP OF OCTOBER MEETING by John Perian

DAVE GOODWIN – FLORIDA’S SPECIAL BIRDS

Even amateur birders of many years in the field can learn something new about the wild birds that bring us so much joy and satisfaction. The Sun City Center Audubon Club had the pleasure of learning some of those details from expert birder David Goodwin at its October 4th meeting.



Dave Goodwin and Pam Kie-Viner

Goodwin is a retired history teacher from Pinellas County. His other passion and hobby of avian study and observation have kept him out of trouble for more than 50 years. The 77-year-old former native of South Carolina is a founding member and two-time past president of the Florida Ornithological Society. He has led hundreds of field trips for many Audubon Club Chapters in the Tampa Bay area and elsewhere in Florida. He's also led groups of birders at the Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival, the Florida Birding and Nature Festival and the Wings and Wildflower Festival. Goodwin is also an environmental educator at St. Petersburg's Boyd Hill Nature Preserve.

Many beginning and intermediate "Bird Watchers" (the older moniker for Birders) often get two bird species confused in the wild. One is the big footed and colorful Purple Gallinule. The other water bird species is the introduced Gray Headed Swamp Hen. They look very much alike at first glance. But a closer look, Goodwin explained, will make the correct identification much easier.

The Gallinule has what's called a "Frontal Shield" starting on its beak and working back to its forehead, that's made up of fleshy brightly colored tissue. The Purple Gallinule's "Shield" is a light blue color. And its legs are bright yellow. The bird itself is pigeon sized – much thinner and smaller than the Swamp Hen.

The Gray Headed Swamp Hen is an invasive species that was introduced here from Asia about 30 years ago. It's a much larger, stockier bird, with a red colored Frontal Shield and red legs.

The topic of Goodwin's lecture and slide show highlighted Florida's "Special" Bird species. They included Florida's only endemic bird, the Scrub Jay, the Sandhill Crane, the Roseate Spoonbill, the Crested Caracara Falcon, Snail Kites and Swallow-Tailed Kites, The extremely loud and mournful night-time singer, the Limpkin, as well as Florida's Burrowing Owl, the American Flamingo, Red Cockaded Woodpecker, Wood Stork and the Reddish Egret.

Goodwin started his lecture with one of the largest birds in Florida or the United States, for that matter. The Sandhill Crane.

This ubiquitous bird is found throughout the United States but is particularly noticeable here in the state. Not only because of its size. But because it's not afraid of people.

It will stand and gaze at you with a look of unblinking curiosity. Some people feed them, which is not recommended. When it loses interest, it turns around and goes back to pecking in your yard looking for beetles, grubs and anything else that looks tasty. You know...the critters that would probably destroy your lawn.



Goodwin said the Sandhill Crane was one of the first birds he identified when he came to Florida. He said that he and some friends in his high school senior Biology Class conned their teacher into escorting them on a Spring Break Trip to Everglades National Park. "Somewhere between Sarasota and Myakka State Park," he said. "I saw my very first Sandhill Crane. It's not anything special, because they are found all over North America. But I still love them. That's why I just had to start off today's discussion with that bird."

The next bird he talked about was the state's only endemic bird, the Florida Scrub Jay. It's one of four distinct species of "Scrub Jay" and is the only one found east of the Rocky Mountains. More importantly, it never strays outside of the Sunshine State.

However, it's a separate subgroup of the Scrub Jays. There's one species called the "Island Scrub Jay," that's only found on Santa Cruz Island off California's coast. The other two are the California Scrub Jay, that's found from the coastal areas of Washington down to Baja California. The last species is the Woodhouse's Scrub Jay, that's found in the Great Basin (Nevada) and the Rocky Mountains. That's it.

The historic population of Florida's Scrub Jay is estimated to have been more than 40,000 birds. The curious and attentive Florida Scrub Jay has been in North America for hundreds of thousands of years. Today, there are only about 7,700 to 9,300 left of this unique bird.

Their habitat consists solely of high elevation (for Florida) dry oak tree scrub and open sandy patches and ridges, with few if any dense overhead canopies. Almost 90% of the original scrub oak and sandy ridgelines the birds have used have been bulldozed to make way for construction. Overdevelopment of our land for residential housing, businesses, and agriculture is a potential death knell for the Florida Scrub Jay. Each Scrub Jay family needs a minimum of 24 acres of open low growth territory to survive.



In Florida they live in four core areas – the Ocala National Forest in Marion County, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge and Kennedy Space Center in Brevard County, Lake Wales Ridge in Highlands County, Cape Canaveral Space Force Station, also in Brevard County.

A few other smaller, managed areas, where the Florida Scrub Jay retains a fairly stable population, includes Oscar Scherer State Park in Sarasota County, Wingate Creek State Park in Manatee County, Jonathan Dickinson State Park in Martin County and Deltona's Lyonia Preserve in Volusia County.

The Scrub Jay species was originally a western American Bird. About 2 million years ago, dropping sea levels allowed the birds to migrate to what would become Florida. At the end of the last Ice Age, rising sea levels once again trapped the "Florida" Scrub Jay populations here. During the intervening millennia, the Florida Scrub Jay evolved distinct traits and genetics, that allowed them to become a separate species. They are related to other birds in the Corvid Family of songbirds, including Crows, Ravens, Rooks, Jays, Magpies and Nutcrackers.

Florida's Scrub Jay is a federally recognized "Threatened" bird that's been protected under the Endangered Species Act since 1987. Just to reiterate, the declining populations of this curious and brave bird are due primarily to Housing and Business Development, Orange Grove Agriculture and other habitat loss.

Each Scrub Jay family needs about 24 acres of territory, so that it can comfortably find food and raise its young. Their primary diet consists of beetles, caterpillars, grasshoppers, and other bugs. Acorns, berries, seeds, lizards, small snakes, toads, frogs and mice. Occasionally, they eat other birds' eggs.

As Goodwin said, our Scrub Jay is one of only five other species of birds that are considered Cooperative Breeders. "That means when one nest of fledglings is old enough, they stay to help the parents raise the next brood. It's a multi-generational system of sharing the workload." Finishing his discussion about the Florida Scrub Jay, Goodwin said, "I was a little disappointed that it wasn't selected as Florida's State Bird. It's the only wild bird that is truly ours."

Oscar Scherer State Park is the closest place to Sun City Center, where the dwindling population of Florida Scrub Jay used to be seen in greater numbers. In the past few years, however, because of housing development that encircles the Park, their numbers have been decreasing.

"They're very friendly birds," Goodwin said. "They like to come and investigate, when people walk nearby. Sometimes, the entire family of 4 to 8 Scrub Jays will come to take a look at you at one time." Goodwin showed photographs of people with a Scrub Jay sitting on top of their head or arm. Supposedly, the button on top of a baseball hat resembles a nut to the birds. Other photos showed a scrub jay sitting on a photographer's telephoto lens, while looking at the man taking a picture of something far away.

Five Southern States today list the Northern Mockingbird as their State Bird – Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee and Florida. According to The International Union for Conservation of Nature's "Red List of Threatened Species," the Mockingbird is classified as the least concern for danger of extinction.

Therefore, why wasn't Florida's native Scrub Jay voted as the Florida State Bird? Nobody seems to know why not. The Scrub Jay could care less. It would prefer the State of Florida to set aside more of its habitat, so that it could be taken off of the Threatened List.

The other "Special Birds" that Goodwin discussed included the Roseate Spoonbill, Crested Caracara, the Swallow-Tailed Kite and the Snail Kite, the loud and mournful Limpkin, with its Banshee-like call, Florida's

Burrowing Owl, the Reddish Egret, the Wood Stork, the Red Cockaded Woodpecker, and the American Flamingo.

Goodwin then talked about the Crested Caracara Falcon. Florida has been home to the Caracara since the last Ice Age, when it was isolated from the rest of its kind.



The Caracara is also found in Texas, Mexico and further south. They prefer open grass prairies and ranch lands. Like other falcons, the Caracara can stick its toes out straight like a human being. And it loves to run. It has long legs and reminds some people of Africa's Secretary Bird, which also prefers running than flying. Goodwin said it can give a Roadrunner a "run" for its money. So, it can catch its prey in the air or on the ground.

Another interesting habit it has is to perform a preparatory move for vocalizing. It's called a "head throwback." It tilts its head all the way back onto its folded wings. Then it lets out a cackling, rattling, growling sound, when it wants to announce its whereabouts to the other Caracaras in the vicinity.

Most of Florida's Crested Caracara reside in the Kissimmee River Valley and open ranch lands between Orlando and Lake Okeechobee. Although it has quite the varied diet, even going so far as to eat fruit or nuts on occasion, it's a carrion eater like vultures and hawks.

Goodwin told the audience that lots of Caracara's used to be seen closer to Sun City Center in the vicinity of Moccasin Wallow Road, near Parrish. "The Caracara is also dealing with habitat loss," he said. "Housing development has taken over the land the birds used to inhabit. Now, they're all gone from that area."

The best way to identify the Caracara is to see it in flight. If you can see what Goodwin called the "Four Points of Light," with a white colored head, wing tips and tail, it's a Crested Caracara. "No other bird has those four identifying features," he said.

The next two birds really got the members' attention. Goodwin went into detail about the beautiful and graceful Swallow-Tailed Kite and its relative the Snail Kite. Both are extremely interesting and lovely to observe.

The Swallow-Tailed Kite has unusual table manners. Unlike most raptors, which eat their prey in the nest or on the ground, the majestic white and black bird with its forked tail, eats its meals on the fly. Its favorite food? Dragonflies. It rips the insect's wings off first, then devours it. It usually breeds in Florida in Spring and Summer. And winters in Central and South America. This is another migratory bird that flies across the Gulf of Mexico twice a year.



The Avian Research and Conservation Institute in Gainesville placed transmitters on Swallow Tailed Kites a few years ago and monitor them, as they cross the Gulf and the Andes Mountains. This is quite an accomplishment for the birds. The Andes are the second tallest mountain range in the world. Second only to the Himalayas in Asia. Swallow Tailed Kites must fly between 13,000 and 22,000 feet, in order to get to their wintering grounds. Then, on the way back to Florida, it's another long haul across the Gulf of Mexico. Sometimes not all of them make it.

One Swallow Tailed Kite was tracked all the way to Bermuda. That's more than 1,000 miles of flight time, without landing to rest or eat. Reportedly, it was blown off course while flying across the Gulf. It eventually made it to North Carolina and then finally flew south to Florida.

Then there is Florida's Snail Kite. It's a darker plumed and stockier bird than the Swallow Tail. Its diet consisted almost entirely of the two-inch-long native Apple Snails. Those Gastropods, which means "Belly Foot," are snails that crawl around on a muscular and slimey "foot." Like other similar species, they have a tough shell and are usually found wherever there is shallow, running water.

The Snail Kite used to hang out in the Everglades. Not anymore. It has relocated north to the area in and around Paynes Prairie near Gainesville. Over the years, Florida's Apple Snails started to disappear from the Everglades. Then about 1989, the much larger South American Island Apple Snail was discovered in the West Palm Beach area. They were originally imported for the Aquarium trade. By 2017, Hurricane Irma helped inundate the prairie with water. That, in turn, helped boost the invasive Apple Snail population there.

This species of snail is huge – almost 6-inches long. Within 20 to 30 years, the Snail Kite developed a much stronger "mouth." This allowed it to stick its specially adapted beak inside the large, muscular snail, to extract it for a meal.

"This was the fastest case of Spot Evolution anyone has ever seen," Goodwin said. "Every one of the Snail Kites in Florida now have the modified, stronger beak. Now that's Natural Selection."

Goodwin then went on to wrap things up with a brief overview of the Roseate Spoonbill. It's a bird that many people confuse with the American Flamingo. With two good and glaring distinctions – the Flamingo's downward curved beak look like Nepal's National Knife, the Kukri. The Roseate's bill looks like giant spoon. They can both be bright pink or white, depending on what they've been eating. Brine Shrimp or other crustaceans cause the feathers to change color. The native Florida Flamingo was wiped out from the state by the turn of the 20th Century. The women's hat trade killed them for their plumage, which was in fashion at the time.

A few years ago, during Hurricane Idalia, a flock of Flamingos were blown off course from their home in Cuba. They landed in the Everglades and have been residing here ever since.

According to Audubon Florida, instead of flying back to the Caribbean or Mexico, about 125 of the bright pink birds stayed in South Florida. This group was specifically identified in Florida Bay and photographed in 2025. Audubon experts indicated that restoration projects in the Everglades and Florida Bay have improved water flow, salinity and food supplies for the Flamingos, creating a healthy permanent habitat for them.

Finally, Goodwin made mention of Florida's very small Burrowing Owls. They aren't much bigger than an American Robin. They are also losing their habitat of prairie and grassland, where they dig their nest cavities in the ground. One of their prey items is the invasive and poisonous Cuban Tree Frog. It may be toxic to almost everything else, but our Burrowing Owl places it high on its list of favorite meals.



Before he finished his presentation, Goodwin recommended a very funny movie, that most Birders have thoroughly enjoyed. The name of the 2011 movie is called "The Big Year," directed by David Frankel, with Steve Martin, Jack Black and Owen Wilson. The movie is based on the 2004 non-fiction book by journalist Mark Obmascik, "The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature and Fowl Obsession." It's about a trio of Birders who are participating in the yearlong, extremely intense though informal competition between North American Bird Watchers.

Zealous Birders who partake of this strenuous competition try to identify and list the most bird species between January and December each year. Those who do participate pay thousands of dollars and persevere with bad weather, marshes, swamps, mountains and prairie from Alaska to Florida, to compete in this physically exhausting challenge. There is no monetary award. Bragging Rights is all the top three Birders receive.

Happy Thanksgiving!

