



Sun City Center Audubon Club

April 2024

Prez Ponderings April 2024

Note that the club will be drawing the winning raffle ticket for the Audubon **“Painted Finches”** print at our April 6th meeting. A few tickets are still available for purchase, so be sure to buy a ticket! Your odds of winning are very good indeed.

Our speaker for our April meeting will be Marly Fuller, Director of Strategic Communications for the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation. She will be talking of the importance of the corridor to Florida wildlife & our residents. Florida is one of only two states that have such a corridor.

Ray Webb will give a report of our first overnight field trip in a few years to Wakulla Springs State Park & Lodge. Among other movies, two Tarzan movies with Johnny Weissmuller were filmed there, as well as the first 3-D horror film The Creature from The Black Lagoon & it’s sequel as well. Ray also held a field trip meeting on March 15th to organize day trips for the upcoming 2024-25 season.

We have two positions open on our Board. We have a need for a Vice President to help with day-to-day duties, and for someone to handle Membership duties. Knowledge of Excel spreadsheets would be preferable for the membership role, which keeps a roster of our members’ information, dues payments, etc. Contact us if you are interested. Either position can be shared with another person, as we have Co-Presidents & Co-Treasurers.

Among the highlights of belonging to the Audubon Club is the social hour we host prior to our monthly meetings. Members get to hobnob with each other while drinking free coffee or tea and tasting delectable snacks.

That is followed by an interesting presentation on varying topics of interest to our club. But like most good things, there is a cost. Coffee, creamer, sweeteners, and cups are not free to us. There are also printing costs for our brochures, bookmarks, and forms. We also give our speakers an honorarium for their time and travel to entertain us. So please buy a 50/50 raffle ticket for our last meeting of the spring—next meeting is the first Saturday in October. Please donate!

Don’t forget you can join John Lampkin on April 2nd at 9 a.m. as he leads the monthly Nature Trail hike, exploring birds, insects, plants & other animals at the trail, located in the 1700 block of W. Del Webb Blvd. Wear long pants, use sun block & insect repellent.

At the February 20th Community Association Club Leaders meetings, **the CA announced a policy that all clubs must check CA Badges to make sure that attendees have paid their 2024 CA dues. This applies to Kings Point and Freedom Plaza members as well as regular Sun City Center residents.**

Lest we forget, please be sure to thank our volunteers who greet you, check you in, man the tables, and provide the coffee & snacks that you enjoy each meeting. A heartfelt “Thank You” means a lot to all of us.

Nancy & Alan Renfrow, Co-Presidents
Email: ac.coprez@gmail.com

Don’t forget to VOLUNTEER!

THE URBAN FOREST

by John Perian



Eric Muecke

Speaker SCC Audubon March 2nd meeting

Forget everything you ever thought you knew about trees in the city. Most of what you learned years ago was wrong. Everything from planting trees between the curb and your sidewalk, to the kind of trees city planners' thought were appropriate to the placement of these trees on peoples' properties. In the past, it was all poorly researched, planned and executed.

It's been more than 100 years since city planners first started including trees in their development phase. Cities like Tampa have come a long way since then. Today's Urban Forests come in many different shapes and sizes. They can include urban parks, landscaped boulevards, river and coastal promenades, river corridors and nature preserves, manicured gardens and trees at former industrial sites. The "wizards" and experts in this field of study are called "Arborists." They are educated and trained to be the guardians of Trees, Shrubs and other flora.

Urban Forestry Expert Eric Muecke is one such Tree Expert. He was the guest speaker at the Sun City Center Audubon Club's March 2nd meeting in the Florida Room at the Atrium. Muecke is the Urban Forestry Manager of the City of Tampa. He is also on the Advisory Board of the Florida Urban Forestry Council. His presentation last month was about the various tree species that do well in an urban environment, the value of these trees for our population in Hillsborough County and tree planting programs here and in the general vicinity of Tampa Bay.

To begin with, Muecke said that, when developers think about downtown city planning and revitalization, they usually think about where stores, banks, restaurants and hotels will go. And, where designated parking areas should be set aside. Often, trees aren't even considered until the end of a development project.

What trees do you want, how many of each do you think you will need and where they should be planted has to be the first thing to be discussed, before buildings, streets and utilities are even considered, he explained.

When you go through the old section of Tampa, he said, you see all of these four foot by four foot tree pits with sad looking trees planted there. Unfortunately, those spots between the street and store fronts are the most convenient places to construct or replace all of the underground utilities. When you have to take them out, you realize it's not the best spot to plant a tree.

"We've been changing some things in Tampa," he said. "so, we now have suspended or cantilevered sidewalks. We're making sure that utilities are not installed through the soil resources for the trees." Tampa has been utilizing Muecke's expertise for the past six years.

His discussion at the club's March meeting started with a definition and explanation about what a Tree is. There are basically three parts of a tree: the canopy, the trunk and branches and the roots. And they all rely on each other. Muecke noted that the canopy or top of the tree is its Power Plant. That's where the leaves are and where they get food. With the help of the sun, the leaves make all of the energy that the tree needs, while it's growing.

The branches that are attached to the trunk provide support and structure to the canopy. But they are also the storage and transport system of the tree. In winter, the leaves change color, die and fall to the ground. The "power plant" shuts down for the season. In those colder regions of the country, the sap, sugar and waste get stored in the branches and trunk. Eventually they transport that food to the roots.

In the tree's "basement," raw materials like water and basic nutrients are absorbed by the roots. But that isn't the tree's food. It only gets that from the top. The Canopy.

Urban Forest Cont'd

Here's how a tree grows. There are only three spots on a tree, where the cells divide and elongate: In the tips of the branches and the buds. The tips of the roots. And, the Cambium, which is situated right below the bark. It's the only part of the tree that actually grows. It makes new bark and new wood, when it receives food from the canopy, the branches, and the trunk. The oldest part of the tree is at its base. Not at the top.



Melanie Higgins & Eric Muecke

“When you buy a new tree to plant, you want to look at the bottom and identify a stem or a central leader, and the last four inches at the top. Everything else on that tree will go away in the course of the next twenty years. As it grows, you will have to remove the lower branches of your tree, to make sure you have the necessary clearance underneath.”

Muecke said that Crepe Myrtles are the number one tree that's requested in the City of Tampa. However, Crepe Myrtles are not native to Florida. And, they don't have a whole lot of wildlife benefits. But they are pretty. Unfortunately, when it's time to prune the foliage, most tree companies do it all wrong. They often give a Crepe Myrtle a crew cut and “top it off.” They remove most of the canopy, where the tree gets its food. Most of the time, he added, the tree never fully recovers and will never look as good as it should have.

Every tree is different, he explained. Landscapers and Tree Companies have to know how each tree works. And, how each tree is supposed to be properly trimmed, in order to keep it healthy and looking beautiful.

When Arborists talk about trees, they discuss the economic impact of trees, their environmental importance, and the social benefit of these magnificent specimens.

“When we plant trees and shrubs around our homes,” he said. “we can actually put a price tag on the benefits we are receiving from whatever we plant. If we have one large tree on our property, the value of the parcel goes up by about 1 percent. Landscaping the yard can increase its value by up to 20 percent of the value of your home.”

He went on to say that a tree that shades the air conditioning compressor outside your home can also save a homeowner about 10 percent on your energy bill. A big tree that shades part of the roof can increase your energy bill even more.

In Florida there is something called “storm water interception.” A large tree can absorb more than 750 gallons of water per year. And the tree is not soaking that rainwater up from the ground. That interception is the rain that sticks to the leaves, the branches, the twigs, the bark. And, when the rain event is over, it evaporates. “And, the cool thing about that,” he said, “is that it never goes into a storm sewer.”

“Storm water is a big issue to the City of Tampa,” he said. “If we could increase our tree canopy, we could really decrease a lot of runoff.” Some cities, like Houston, Texas, have lots of concrete and not enough trees. That city always has a lot of street flooding after a deluge.

A tree can also remove almost 4 pounds of ozone and 3 pounds of particulate matter from the air each year. Particulates are the things that cause haze to form over the city and water. A tree will actually absorb about 330 pounds of carbon dioxide from the air annually.

In today's world of climate changes and extremes, an Urban Forest can be a life saver. Because there aren't enough trees in a large city, like Atlanta, for example, the heat that's generated from the streets, pavement and the buildings can cause what's known as a “heat island effect.” The heat that's reflected off of the asphalt and concrete will rise up and actually attract dangerous weather patterns. In 2008, an EF2 Tornado went through downtown Atlanta for that very reason, Muecke said.

Urban Forest Cont'd

Having more trees in an urban area can have community, social and health benefits. It encourages us to get outside and meet our neighbors, provide us with a more relaxed and friendly environment. Trees help lower the ambient temperature outside in the heat of the summer months. Sometimes by up to 25 degrees cooler in the shade of a single mature tree.

Walking or sitting in a tree lined park or nature preserve has also been found to help relieve stress and depression. Studies from the University of Illinois have found that trees can even help kids with ADHD (Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder).

“One of the studies showed that the more time a child with ADHD sits in front of a computer or television, the worse the disorder can become,” he said. “The more you can get them outside where it's green, the problems associated with ADHD go way down.”

Muecke's comments about trees and a person's mental health are not empty bragging. Researchers at the University of Illinois and Taiwan University conducted a cooperative 10-year study of that topic and discovered that getting out and experiencing green landscapes, including trees and shrubs, has a definite positive impact on an individual's health, optimal functioning, as well as stronger and safer neighborhoods.

Jokingly, Muecke added, “Who would have thought that they would put landscaping and mental health together! They (the Landscape and Human Health Laboratory at the University of Illinois) are doing a fantastic job of reporting that evidence.”

The other really important thing to consider before planting a tree is what it will look like when it's mature. It's not such a good idea to plant a Live Oak, Southern Magnolia, Gumbo Limbo, an Elm or other large tree within 15-20 feet or more of a sidewalk, driveway or your home's foundation. Otherwise, as the tree grows, the roots can work their way underneath those structures and destroy it...and your pocketbook.

“It's also important to be certain you aren't digging a hole for your tree over irrigation, cable or utility lines,” he said. In our area, dial “811” or 1-800-432-4770, at least two days before you plan to dig. Someone will ask you a few questions about your plans to dig or plant something. Afterwards, someone will come and mark your property with flags, to indicate where utility lines and other underground cables are buried.

If you dig a hole, without first calling the appropriate agency or going on the internet to find “Sunshine 811,” it could become a rather costly mistake. It's important to make sure a utility line or something else is not already buried there. Otherwise, you could be on the hook to pay for the damage, Muecke said. “It costs about \$10,000 to repair and splice a damaged fiber optic cable.”

Sun City Center has two cable TV providers and three satellite TV providers. I've had both Spectrum and now have Frontier Cable Company. While they may not have “fiber optic” service yet, they do have cable TV and WiFi service.

My TV and WiFi service starts near the curb in a junction box. The orange-colored insulated cable is placed about nine inches below ground level from the junction box to my home. I would be extremely careful, if you aren't sure what is below the spot you want to plant a tree or shrub. Better to be safe, than sorry.

Meanwhile there are several online resources, that may be of interest to people who are interested in planting trees, shrubs, flowers and other perennials on their property. Muecke said club members can contact him at his official email address at:

Eric.Muecke@tampagov.net

Other sites include: the Florida Native Plant Society at fnps.org; the Florida Invasive Species Council at floridainvasivespecies.org; the International Society of Arboriculture at isa-arbor.com or treesaregood.org; the Florida Friendly Plant Selection Guide at fll.ifas.ufl.edu or you can download the app for your iPhone or Android by selecting Florida Friendly Landscape Plants (FFL Plants).

Bluebird Box Trail
Article & Photo by Larry Walsh
Certified Dream Builder Coach

Box # 1 at Freedom Plaza has **BLUE BIRDS** building a nest! It was so cute when Debbie and I checked the nest we often talk to an older couple who are always sitting out by box #1. He asked me a few weeks ago “what can we do to attract them?” I said “just train your mind to focus on Bluebirds.”

Today he said “it must have worked!”

As we stood there talking the female came back with nesting material. The lady also told me she sees them chasing the squirrels away. That’s a good sign!

No activity in the other 4 boxes.
It was a very exciting day for these bird watchers.



Our Visit to the Butterfly Rainforest
March 4th & 5th



Butterfly Rainforest



This little guy tries to blend in with the background

Photos by Alan Renfrow

BYOM

Bring Your Own Mug

&

**PLEASE REMEMBER TO BRING
YOUR CA BADGE TO THE MEETING**

News from our Master Birder

Ray Webb

We have just completed our first overnight trip in several years. Various developments, including the COVID period, have prevented us from scheduling them until now. Jo Ann Wilkinson had volunteered to be our overnight trip chair, allowing us to complete our trip to Wakulla Lodge, near Tallahassee, on March 4-5.

We began with a visit to the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings (author of "The Yearling" book) Historic State Park in Cross Creek. Unfortunately, her historic house was temporarily closed to visitors, but we explored the house and property outside. We then went to the Visitor Center at Paynes Prairie State Park, near Gainesville, where we enjoyed views of the Prairie and a picnic lunch. At the Lodge, we had dinner and breakfast, birded the grounds and had a boat ride on Wakulla Springs. On the way home, we visited the Butterfly Rainforest at USF and made a surprise stop at the Russell Stover Outlet Store in Wildwood, where many of us bought Easter chocolates. Next year, we are planning a three-day trip to the Space Coast area on the east coast.

Upcoming trips include a visit to the Venice Rookery on March 28, where we will observe the comings and goings of nesting wading birds, pelicans, anhingas and others from the comfort of a nearby pavilion, followed by a luncheon at the nearby Snowbird Grille in Venice. On April 17 we will visit Fort De Soto Park in Pinellas County, for our annual Spring Bird Migration field trip. We hope to see many species of warblers, orioles, tanagers, buntings and others!

We are also planning our summer field trip schedule, which will begin on May 23 with a visit to the Clearwater Marine Aquarium. Here we will explore the facility and its inhabitants, plus take a boat tour and enjoy lunch. Plans are in the works for a visit to Safari Wilderness Park in Lakeland on June 20.

You can get further details on all our trips online at scaaubonclub.com, or at our April 6 club meeting at 9:30 AM in the Florida Room.



Photos from Florida Wildlife Corridor



Great Blue Heron Wakulla Springs State Park

April 6th Meeting FLORIDA WILDLIFE CORRIDOR

by John Perian

Only twelve states have created “wildlife corridors,” to allow a safe and unimpeded pathway for wild animals to use as they patrol their territories. Florida is only one of two states east of the Mississippi River, that have adopted these wildlife thoroughfares, when the legislature enacted the Wildlife Corridor Act of 2021. The other state is Virginia.

As a result of that political foresight, more than 130 endangered animals and 69 imperiled plant species now have a second chance of surviving the onslaught of human development. Nearly 18 million acres of wilderness areas between the Florida Panhandle and the Everglades have been set aside for the state's threatened Panthers, Black Bears, Otters, American Alligators and Crocodiles, Sea Turtles, Birds and the Florida Manatee.

The Sun City Center Audubon Club will host the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation Director of Strategic Communications, Marly Fuller, at its Saturday, April 6th, meeting in the Florida Room at the North Campus's Atrium Building off of North Pebble Beach Boulevard. She will discuss what the Wildlife Corridor is, where it is and why it is so important to the state's wildlife, as well as its resident population of Floridians.



Fuller said that there are 10 million acres of public lands or easements, that are listed as permanent conservation areas. However, she added, there are at least an additional 8 million acres of wilderness areas in Florida that still need protection.



When they have access to those remaining crucial undeveloped areas, the wildlife in the state will have a contiguous “highway” from north to south, that will finally give them the uninterrupted green spaces they need to survive and prosper. Fuller's presentation will include an award-winning Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation documentary film, that provides answers to the basic questions about why Florida's wildlife corridor is so important.

After her presentation, Fuller will give the audience ample opportunity to ask questions, to clarify aspects of the Wildlife Corridor not covered in the lecture. “If you love Florida,” she said. “You don't want to miss this conversation.”

The club will host a social and refreshment segment from 9:15 to 10 am, followed by a few brief club announcements and business. Fuller will then begin her hour length program and follow up with questions from the attendees.



SCC Audubon Club Celery Fields

Article & Photos by John Perian

Sometimes the names we give to streets, towns, ships and historic sites cause people to momentarily stop and wonder. The Sun City Center Audubon Club visited one such place on its field trip to Sarasota County's "Celery Fields" Friday, February 23rd.

The site of today's Celery Fields Conservation Park, in fact, used to be an agricultural site. From about 1927 to 1995, nothing but celery was grown on the 400 acres of former Sawgrass Marsh. Things are a whole lot different these days. My Grandfather wouldn't recognize the place. The Park actually serves a dual purpose. Besides its recreational use, the Celery Fields is also Sarasota County's primary storm water collection zone. The site contains open marshlands, deep ponds, shallow pools and canals.

When the Spanish arrived in Florida in the 1500's, the Calusa Nation called the Sarasota area home. After they and the Spanish made contact, most of the Calusa fell victim to Smallpox and Measles, brought to the New World by the Spaniards and other Europeans.

More than two dozen Birders from the club ventured to the collection of wetland areas and their accompanying wooden boardwalks, to test their birding skills. It was also a great opportunity to enjoy the fresh air and camaraderie of other club members. Oaks, willows and pines also dot the eastern and southern boundaries. It's a beautiful park to enjoy the wildlife, the view and the solitude.

On the north side of the preserve sits a huge man made mountain covered in grass and a little bit of shrubbery. You'll get a great bird's eye view of the whole area, provided you can walk to the top. It's pretty steep.



It is not the remnants of a landfill, however. When the Sarasota Fruitville Drainage District was formed in 1921, the entire 8,000 acre area eventually was drained and canals dug. This helped make the development of the Phillippi Creek Watershed possible. The leftover mountain of muck and clean soil, that was dumped when the fields and canals were created, is what you see today. At its base are a visitor center and bird feeding stations erected amid native plant gardens.

Instead of acres of annually flooded marsh and peat, or fields of celery, the site is now home to Purple Gallinules, Coots, Blue Winged Teal and other Ducks, Glossy Ibis, Northern Harrier's aka March Hawks and Bald Eagles, Sora and Virginia Rails, Purple Martins, Titmouse, Cardinals, Boat Tail Grackles, Red-winged Blackbirds, Cowbirds, Great Blue Herons, White Egrets, and Eastern Meadowlarks. A Roseate Spoonbill was also seen hunting for food. The Sarasota Audubon Society has documented about 246 different species of birds to date.



Don't forget to buy your raffle tickets for the framed Audubon prints. April Meeting is FINAL Day to purchase!

On both sides of the main containment area, the pond has cattails, lily pads and other freshwater vegetation. It must be a good source of food for the birds, because teal ducks were going heads down and tails up for bottom growing greens. Purple Gallinules, Coots and Glossy Ibis, Roseatte Spoonbills and Great Blue Herons were also picking around the reeds looking for something to eat. We even saw a Bald Eagle slowly flying west, parallel to Palmer Boulevard.

Because of the park's popularity, parking was at a premium that Friday. Of course, the "Snow Birds" are still here, so crowding has to be expected during the week or the weekend, at this time of the year. Another boardwalk, with equally fantastic viewing, is situated on the south shore of the pond. You can park your vehicle along Raymond Road near the second boardwalk.

After a "hard morning" of birding, club members made their way to Stottlemeyer's Smokehouse at lunchtime, for some messy but mouthwatering barbeque. It was a good day to be alive!

April 17th is the scheduled annual Fort De Soto Field Trip, to watch the Spring Bird Migration. Last year's trip to the old military compound was a "hoot," no pun intended.



Kate and Dr. Bob Lochte have gifted our Club with three high quality framed Audubon prints. These pieces were from the estate of their Aunt Jane Davis Doggett, 11/04/1929 – 4/10/23, in her memory. These three framed prints will be raffled off individually, with the first being "Painted Finches." The overall size of the framed print is 30"x43". Sales will be limited to 50 tickets total at \$10.00/per ticket.

Melanie Higgins



Members birding at Celery Fields



Master Birder, Ray Webb leads tour at Celery Fields

More Photos from trip to Butterfly Rainforest Photos by Ray Webb



HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

April 2024

Jay Bowman
 Laura Butler
 Mary Duncan
 Barbara Durant
 Mohsen Khalifa
 John Kosin
 Sally Lamp
 Deanna Lansberry
 Nancy Medeiros
 Joseph Medeiros
 Deborah Perian
 Deborah Pfeiffer
 Clare Roberts
 Rita Tibbetts
 Joe Togger

Have you heard about the

SCC Audubon Club Fund

This fund supports the continued mission of the Sun City Center Audubon Club to promote an understanding of and interest in all wildlife and the environment that supports it; to maintain and improve the Sun City Center Nature Trails, and to further the cause of conservation of natural resources for the benefit of posterity.

Questions, or need assistance with an asset donation to our SCC Audubon Club Fund please contact the Audubon Club Fund advisor at:

Denyve Boyle, CFRE
 Senior Director, Philanthropy
 Community Foundation Tampa Bay
 813.609.4868
dboyle@CFTampaBay.org

Officers & Committee Chairs 2024

<i>Co-Presidents</i>	<i>Nancy & Alan Renfrow</i>
<i>Programs Chair</i>	<i>TBD</i>
<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Betty Giles</i>
<i>Co-Treasurers</i>	<i>Pam & George Viner</i>
<i>Past President</i>	<i>Dennis Morris</i>
<i>Greeter</i>	<i>Linda Floyd</i>
<i>Refreshments</i>	<i>Pat Dean</i>
<i>Membership</i>	<i>TBD</i>
<i>Co-Name Tags</i>	<i>Jo Ann Wilkinson</i>
	<i>Laura Butler</i>
<i>Conservation</i>	<i>TBD</i>
<i>Historian</i>	<i>Clara Clancy</i>
<i>Newsletter</i>	<i>Denise Rosen</i>
<i>Publicity</i>	<i>John Perian</i>
<i>Master Birder & Field Trips</i>	<i>Ray Webb</i>
<i>At Large</i>	<i>Patsie Ginley</i>



Laura Butler & Barb Durant man table at Fun Fest