



Sun City Center Audubon Club

December 2023

Prez Ponderings December 2023

Greetings SCC Audubon Club members!

Here's hoping everyone has had a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday.

Our next meeting is scheduled for:

DATE: Saturday, December 2, 2023
PLACE: COMMUNITY HALL
SOCIAL: 9:15 AM
MEETING: 10:00 AM

SPEAKER: Mike Stott
Birds of Prey (BOP) Lead
Boyd Hill Nature Preserve,
Pinellas County

TOPIC: "Live Birds of Prey"

MUSIC: John Lampkin will be at the
Grand piano playing
seasonal music.

THIS MEETING IS AN APPROVED CLUB FUNDRAISER, which means this event is open to all who wish to attend, including surrounding towns, houseguests, etc. ***NO passes and NO hassle!*** Members are admitted free, as always. **Non-members simply pay a small fee at the door.**

We will be electing and swearing in new officers at our December 2 meeting. Their terms begin on January 1st, 2024. The president and vice-president are due to be elected at this time. All other Board members will remain in place.

Our Refreshment Table needs YOU! Please bring your cookies and pastries pre-plated and place them on the refreshment table.

Thank you!

Our **Share Table** has books, magazines, calendars and pamphlets for FREE! The selection changes each month. And, of course, please donate any nature-related items you no longer need.

Your Audubon Club Board of Directors has continued the tradition of contributing to the **SCC Employee Holiday Gift Fund**, which is administered by an independent community group. Our SCC Campus looks great, our buildings are well maintained, and our meeting rooms are always clean and neat. The employees even make the coffee prior to each meeting. They cut the grass on the Nature Trail, and promptly set up the equipment for our Earth Day Celebration each year. The partnership between the SCC employees and the Audubon Club has been excellent, and **we wish the SCC employees a very happy holiday season.**

The 2nd Annual Bird and Nature Art Festival is scheduled for the next Audubon Club meeting **on January 6, 2024 at Community Hall.** As you may remember, each Audubon Club member may display their one favorite bird or nature painting, print, photo, or object of art. ***JOIN THE FUN . . . IT'S EASY!*** Submit a registration form at the meeting, then just bring your artwork for display on January 6th!

I wish each of you a happy and safe holiday season.

Dennis Morris, President
5w3d15h80y@gmail.com
570-814-2803

Greetings!

Be part of our Audubon Club's celebration of the New Year!

Our SCC Audubon Club's **Bird & Nature Art Festival** is fast approaching.

When: At our January Club meeting
Date: Saturday, January 6, 2024
Place: COMMUNITY HALL, S. Pebble Beach Blvd.

FAQ's:

What is the Art Festival about?

Each member is encouraged to display one (1) favorite bird or nature painting, print, photo, or object of art.

Is the Art Festival a contest?

No. The Art Festival is purely for enjoyment.

Is the Festival an art sale?

No.

JOIN THE FUN . . . IT'S EASY!

Complete the attached form

Mail to: Art Festival, PO Box 5133, Sun City Center, FL 33571 (our new Club address)

OR

Email to: pamgeov@gmail.com

Deadline: Received by December 27, 2023

THEN, just bring your artwork for display at the Festival to the meeting on January 6th.

When you arrive, you'll receive:

- A personalized printed display card
- A display location
- A mention in the Festival brochure

A reminder email with instructions will be sent to participants a few days ahead. Questions? You may respond to this email, or call.

Thanks for being a Festival participant!

Pam Viner
518-322-9590

December SCC Audubon Meeting

Saturday, December 2, 2023

COMMUNITY HALL

John N. Perian, Jr.

Birds of Prey



A special live "Birds of Prey" presentation hosted by the Sun City Center Audubon Club will be held at the South Campus Community Hall Saturday morning, Dec. 2, 2023. This meeting and the January 6, 2024 meeting will be fundraiser events that are open to non-members for a donation admission fee at the door.

Volunteer Raptor specialists from the **Boyd Hill Nature Preserve** in St. Petersburg will be bringing several hawks and owls with them to show the audience. Volunteers J. Michael Stott and Donna Conway will discuss the history of these birds of prey, as well as the different hunting strategies and traits of these avian predators. Stott and Conway will be walking among the guests, so they can get an up-close look at the birds. Accompanying their handlers will be Red Tail Hawks "Edge" and "Dancer," "Aldo," a Barred Owl, a Short-Tailed Hawk and two different varieties of Screech Owls, a red and a gray colored mutation.

Refreshments will be offered, and socializing encouraged prior to the start of the meeting and lecture between 9:15 and 10 a.m. The Community Hall is located at SCC's South Campus

1910 S. Pebble Beach Blvd., Sun City Center, FL. For more information, contact Dennis at 1-570-814-2803.



Field Trips

- 12/08/23 **Bok Towers Gardens
Lake Wales, FL**
- 1/16/24 **Wild Florida Sanctuary
Riverview, FL**
- 2/23/24 **The Celery Fields
Sarasota, FL**
- 3/28/24 **Venice Rookery
Venice FL**
- 4/17/24 **Fort Desoto County Park
Pinellas County, FL**

For more information on Programs & Field Trips please visit our website at

www.sccaudubonclub.com

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. The print will be available for viewing at the October 7th meeting.

Melanie Higgins



www.sccaudubonclub.com

Meetings

1st Saturday of the Month
Florida Room in Atrium

9:15am Coffee Social

10:00am Business Meeting followed by
Scheduled Program and
Adjournment

Backyard Habitat for Birds

John N. Perian, Jr.

In case you missed our November meeting, here is a great recap you must read.

Did you know that feeding birds and other wildlife in Florida is illegal? With all the backyard bird feeders hanging in yards throughout Sun City Center and other communities in Florida, that might seem a bit weird. Fortunately, like everything else in life, there are exceptions and exemptions to the rule. Bird Feeders are one of them! That is the word, according to James B. Stevenson, the Audubon Club's guest speaker at its November 4th meeting in the Florida Room of the Atrium Building on the North Pebble Beach Boulevard campus.



Stevenson is the University of Florida/IFAS (Institute for Food and Agricultural Sciences) Pinellas County Extension Service specialist at the Brooker Creek Nature Preserve in Tarpon Springs. The topic of his lecture was "Backyard Habitat for Birds."

"Bird feeders can be very useful and beneficial," Stevenson said. "but they are mainly for entertainment purposes. Our fun and entertainment. And they are definitely fun to watch."

Birds and other wildlife, though, have survived for millions of years without our help. In today's world, however, human development has significantly reduced the amount of native habitat that is available for birds and other wild animals. People in Sun City Center can do a few things to help provide birds with the staples they need to survive food, fresh clean water, cover or shelter, and the space to fly and access your backyard habitat.

Stevenson said anyone can create a bird friendly landscape. Even in a community that has a homeowner's Association with its landscape rules and regulations, there are acceptable ways to provide a natural habitat for our avian friends.

Limiting the amount of lawn in your yard is a good compromise, he explained. Some lawn is desired for children, pets and other leisure activities. But planting a diversity of flowers, plants, shrubs, and trees in specific areas of your property can be a magnet for birds. And it can also be aesthetically pleasing.

Providing other sources of food, like seeds and grain in a feeder, is another method of attracting birds to your property. However, it's important to position your feeders at least 10 feet from a tree or large shrub. Sometimes an ambush predator, like a Cooper's Hawk, will perch and wait in a tree for an unsuspecting bird to stop by your feeding station. Then the bird feeder becomes the bird feeder for the hawk!

Most experts agree that excellent generic food sources for most birds are hulled sunflower and black oil sunflower seeds and white proso millet. Mealworms and Nyjer Thistle seeds, as well as suet cakes are all extremely attractive to a multitude of wild birds, especially during the cooler months of the year in Florida.

Then there are squirrels to consider. "Nobody knows what to do about squirrels," Stevenson told the audience. There are a few suggestions that he and others have made, however. Using a bird feeder, that has a weight activated spring door or a wire mesh around it, can help to keep the squirrels and larger birds at bay. The Brome Bird Care company and other manufacturers have several different types of feeders that can help nip that problem in the bud.



Cont'd Backyard Habitat

The next thing that birds need is a source of fresh, clean water. "But, that means a commitment from the homeowner," he said. "Birds can't hold it, you know what I mean? If they gotta go, they just go. They don't think about it. It just happens." That bird bath or water container should be flushed, cleaned and refilled on a daily basis, he added. Otherwise, the water becomes fouled with bird droppings, leaves, and seed hulls. Furthermore, after a while, the water will become stagnant and allow algae to grow. Or, it will just evaporate and leave a dry, caked on scum.

Planting native vegetation that our local birds use for food is also a good thing to consider.

Even though wildlife are attracted to some non-native flowers and plants, providing them with the food they have preferred for millennia is always better. Native flora aren't always as showy or colorful. But, they tend to survive better in Florida's summer heat and humidity, as well as the drier conditions of fall and winter. And, they are more resistant to disease and insects.

A few native plants one might consider adding to the yard is the Walter's Viburnum, the Simpson Stopper, Firebush, American Beautyberry, live oaks, Florida native pines and maples, Florida Elm, the Eastern Red Cedar, wild coffee and wax myrtle, marlberry and red mulberry trees, black eyed susan and beach sunflower, frog plants and other native flowers, such as the cherokee bean, coneflowers, passionflower, tickseed, elderberry and saw palmetto. There are several Florida native plant nurseries in our area, that can help you get started.

Although it can be a controversial topic of discussion, Stevenson said, leaving a dead or dying tree alone on your property can be a boon to certain types of birds, like owls, hawks and woodpeckers, as well as smaller tree cavity loving birds.

"Provided it doesn't pose a danger to people," he explained, "it has been studied and proven that a dead tree supports more organisms and life than a living tree. The wood of a dead tree becomes softer as its cells break down. It allows cavities to be formed in the rotting wood, and that provides nesting habitat for birds. It's also a source of food for insect loving birds."

So, even a dead tree can become an extremely productive piece of a homeowner's landscape. Some garden centers and nurseries even sell sections of dead trees in various sizes, with natural cavities that can be placed in the ground and used as nesting sites.

Reducing the use of chemical pesticides is also worth considering, when planning a native habitat in your yard. Take Tomato plants for example. Stevenson said that he convinced a few people to set aside a couple of their plants for the caterpillars. He suggested applying an insecticide dust only to the plants that these folks wanted to use for food and leaving the rest alone. There are also organic insecticides that don't harm wildlife but will repel or kill the plant eating insects.

"Any pesticide that's applied to a plant can then be magnified in the food chain," he said.

"If one robin eats seven caterpillars that have been sprayed with Sevin Dust or liquid, that's seven times the dose that bird should be eating."

People can also mitigate two other threats to backyard birds. One of the biggest dangers is to allow pet cats to roam free outside. The Smithsonian institution and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that domestic cats kill about 2.4 billion birds and 12.3 billion small mammals each year in the lower 48 states.

"Domestic cats will indiscriminately hunt birds and kill them. Not to eat," Stevenson said.

"Just to kill. It's instinctual. But they shouldn't be allowed to roam free outside of the home."

Another problem wild birds face is building collisions. Researchers at Cornell University's Lab of Ornithology estimated in 2019, that more than 600 million birds are killed each year, after flying into buildings or their windows. Chicago was rated the most dangerous city for migrating birds in the fall and spring migrations. Houston and Dallas came in at a close second. Studies indicate that bright lights emanating from tall buildings in cities across the nation disorient birds. It frequently causes them to veer off course and crash into a building or its windows at full speed.



Cont'd Backyard Habitat

There are a few companies that manufacture window film that the birds can see, so they can avoid a collision. This film is made for commercial and residential purposes. Just to get an idea of what is available, you can Google "CollidEscape.org" or "Featherfriendly.com." Just placing one or two translucent bird stickers on your window is not really effective, Stevenson said. "Birds actually see the spaces between the appliques. Not the sticker itself." So, a bird heading for a window thinks the space is a continuation of its outside environment. That's when it's headed for disaster.

A white window screen actually works better than a window sticker. And, it's much better than a black or green colored screen. And, the birds' chances of surviving a crash into a mesh screen are better than slamming into a glass window.

In conclusion, Stevenson said that creating habitat for our resident and migratory birds is basically about creating an environment within our sphere of influence. That means your yard and the landscaping you create, should become appealing to you, as well as the birds.

The University of Florida/IFAS Extension Service's website has links to various topics that may be of interest to birders and amateur backyard habitat enthusiasts. There are also YouTube presentations, that offer tips for purchasing and growing Florida friendly plants and other related subjects, such as "Attracting Backyard Birds," "How Birds Select Habitat," "Conserving Urban Wildlife in the face of Climate Change."



Stevenson is a native Floridian and graduated from Clearwater High School. After graduating from college, he worked at the North Carolina Botanic Gardens, then went to the Royal Botanic Gardens and the University of Oxford Botanic Gardens in the United Kingdom from 1998 to 2006. Since returning to Florida that year, he has become the Education and Outreach Supervisor of the Pinellas County Parks and Conservation Resources Department. His areas of expertise include Botany, Entomology (study of insects), Ecology (study of organisms and how they relate to each other and their physical environment), and Native Plants, especially ferns, wetland wildflowers, orchids and bromeliads.

PROGRAMS 2023-2024

- 12/02/23** **Birds of Prey**
Mike Stott
Boyd Hill Nature Preserve
(*Community Hall)
- 01/06/24** **Suwanee Cooters**
George Heinrich
Field Biologist
(*Community Hall)
- 02/03/24** **Bugs in your Bloomers**
John Lampkin
- 3/2/24** **The Importance of Urban Forests**
Edward Meucke
COT Forester
- 4/06/24** **Florida Wildlife Corridor**
Marley Fuller
Wildlife Corridor
- 4/19/24** **EARTH DAY
CELEBRATION**
AT THE NATURE TRAILS
(Friday before Earth Day)

***Officers & Committee Chairs
2023***

<i>President</i>	<i>Dennis Morris</i>
<i>Vice-President & Programs</i>	<i>Patsie Ginley</i>
<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Betty Giles</i>
<i>Co-Treasurers</i>	<i>Pam & George Viner</i>
<i>Immediate Past Pres.</i>	<i>Mary Duncan</i>
<i>Greeter</i>	<i>Linda Floyd</i>
<i>Refreshments</i>	<i>Pat Dean</i>
<i>Membership</i>	<i>Merial Graff</i>
<i>Name Tags</i>	<i>Jo Ann Wilkinson</i>
<i>Co-Chair</i>	<i>Laura Butler</i>
<i>Conservation</i>	<i>Melanie Higgins</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>

Neighborhood Cranes looking for food!



Photo by Denise Rosen

These lovely visitors would not let me near my lamp post today, so that I could hang my Christmas lights. It was a standoff. They visit everyday but, on this day, they thought it was their home and would not move. They were actually there for their breakfast of earthworms and insects in my mulch. I let them enjoy their breakfast, then came back later and was successful at putting up my lights.

SCC Audubon Board Meetings

Board meetings are held in the heritage room at 7:00pm on the third Monday of every month.

All Members are invited.



★HAPPY★ BIRTHDAY!

December 2023

Rhonda Blair
Susan Cintron
Susan Crump
Virginia L Ewing
Betty Giles
Bonnie Gitersonke
Merial Graff
Melanie Higgins
Faith Houdek
Sherry Kalczynski
Joan Kramer
Judi Matelski
Linda Menier
Susan Nasrani
Susan Perusse
Barbara Pfeil
Dave Regan
Eleanor Schierkolk
Harriet Seckel
Janell Snape
Merrill Tawse



BYOM

In an endeavor to support our conservation beliefs, please bring your own mug to our Saturday morning meetings. We appreciate your cooperation.

For those of you who use the recycle water bottles, the CA has installed water fountains in the atrium to conveniently refill your water bottles.

So, you say, you forgot your coffee mug, no worries, you can purchase one of our brand-new SCC Audubon Travel Mugs at our next meeting. Available for \$5 each.

