



Sun City Center Audubon Club

February 2024

Prez Ponderings February 2024

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.

That is why we must remind you to pay your 2024 dues if you have not already done so. In addition, you must be a paid member to attend our monthly field trips, and also our overnight trips when they occur. If you do not remember whether you have paid or not, reach out to us and we will check for you. You can ask the volunteers at the check-in table upon arrival.

Make sure you visit our Marketing table and field trip table when you attend next month.

Speaking of field trips, our January trip to Wild Florida Sanctuary was a pleasant surprise! We were prepared to be underwhelmed, but instead were blown away with both the animals and the loving care they get there. Be sure and check out John Perian's article and photos of that trip. WFS is a 501 (c)3 organization for the care of wild animals that cannot be released, or animals that are given to the sanctuary due to care needs. Check them out at www.wildfloridasanctuary.com.

Recently, CA residents have been required to show their CA Badge (not your Audubon name tag) to use CA facilities, including the Florida Room. Those without badges may be requested to leave the building. So that you are not inconvenienced, please **REMEMBER TO BRING YOUR CA BADGE** to the meeting.

Be sure to attend the February 3rd meeting to hear John Lampkin's "Bugs In Your Bloomers" talk. John is always entertaining and educational.

Our next day trip is Friday February 23rd to the Celery Fields in Sarasota. And after several years without one, our overnight trip has returned with our March 4-5 trip to the Panhandle to visit Wakulla Lodge. Ray Webb will talk about both of these trips at our February meeting.

And don't forget—if you have not already paid your 2024 Dues (only \$10 annually), you can remedy that when you check in at the front desk at the February 3rd meeting.

Nancy & Alan Renfrow, Co-Presidents

Email: ac.coprez@gmail.com

Phone: 847 989 9310

Don't forget to VOLUNTEER!



Circle B Bar Reserve

Photo by Co Prez

***The SCC Audubon Club
Bird & Nature Art Show***

Thanks to all the contributors to our January event, what a success and fun day with the Audubon Club.

Tom Bredesen	Moonbills
Clara Clancy (2)	Eagle; Bluebird in the Garden
Carolyn Deming (2)	Blue Heron (Costin); Japanese Print
Patsie Ginley	Canvas wall hanging (Harper)
Beverly Haverkamp	Butterfly Watercolor (Sleziak, her mother)
Marily Holm	Art glass Dolphin
Mariclaire Jones	Etching (Costin)
Cindy Khalifa	Red Sculpted Cardinals
John Kosin	Canade Geese (Lawrence)
Jane Lampkin	Reddish Egret in Flight
John Lampkin	Reddish Egrets
Nancy Landry	Snowy Owl on the Dunes
Cheryl Levin	Vultures on Route 301
Judi Matelski	Bunka Stitchery
Ron Matelski	Wolf Cubs
Pati Messick	Roseate Spoonbill
Joanne Moore	Audubon Picture Book
Sabine Prather	Mission Bay, San Diego
Richard Robillard	Eagle in flight (Swedberg)
Harriet Seckel (2)	Mom & Baby Sandhill Cranes; Cranes
Pamela Viner	Quilted Applique

Bird & Nature Art Show



Wolf Cubs



Sandhill Cranes

Bird & Nature Art Show



Snowy Owl



Tri Color Heron



Bald Eagle

Bird & Nature Art Show



Moonbills



Bunka Stitchery



More from Bird & Nature Art Show



Meetings

1st Saturday of the Month
Florida Room in Atrium

9:15am Coffee Social

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

Upcoming Meeting February 3, 2024 Atrium- Florida Room

Bugs in Your Bloomers

The Sun City Center Audubon Club will host noted award winning nature photographer and entomologist John Lampkin at its next meeting in the Florida Room of the Atrium on Saturday, February 3rd. "Insects and flowering plants have been co-evolving for at least 135 million years,"

Lampkin said. "As a result, both groups have flourished to become our most abundant flora and fauna."



Most people have no idea how really varied, complex and sophisticated "bugs" are. So, what is that insect hovering or crawling over your garden flowers and other plants? And, what exactly is it doing? Lampkin has been investigating these and other questions about the insect world for many years. He plans to share some amazing insights that he has researched, photographed and documented for club members at February's meeting in this beautiful, educational and entertaining lecture.

Lampkin is also a member of the SCC Audubon Club. He is a nationally acclaimed wildlife photographer. He has won many awards and prizes, including the grand prize in the 2020 "American Butterflies" Magazine photo contest. An avid naturalist, he has a multitude of photographic credits in many field guides, books, journals, websites and blogs. His presentation is guaranteed to captivate the audience with his knowledge of insects and his amusing



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.



BLUEBIRD BOX UPDATE

The bluebird boxes are being retrofitted to fix the problem with closures and metal pieces installed to prevent woodpeckers from destroying the openings. Just a little maintenance being done.

See what you missed on the January Field Trip to Wild Florida Sanctuary in Riverview?

A Zoo is a wonderful place for families to visit for a peek at wild domestic and foreign animals, that they would normally not have an opportunity to see. That being said, however, did you ever notice an enclosed zoo animal pacing back and forth behind the bars of its cage? That's not normal behavior. It's a mental health issue for the animal, because it's not in its natural type of habitat. Hundreds of adults and small children also stand in front of the animals' cages every day, and they make a lot of noise and gestures at the animals. It's sad. It's only been in recent years, that most Zoos have attempted to mimic their animals' wild habitat.

An accredited and well managed wildlife sanctuary, on the other hand, is a place where a rescued animal can be protected and live out its life free of the usual stressors a Zoo animal must endure. Furthermore, one must realize that a Zoo is a "for profit" venue. A wildlife sanctuary is not. A licensed wildlife sanctuary is usually inspected at least once a year by state or federal agencies. And, it's a place where rescued animals can live in a peaceful and safe environment. These fortunate wild animals don't have to encounter rowdy children and adults all day long.

About 20 members of the Sun City Center Audubon Club visited the Wild Florida Sanctuary in Riverview on Tuesday, January 16th. Club Historian Clara Clancy led the group that met, carpooled and departed from the parking lot at the South Campus Community Center.

Wild Florida Sanctuary owner Robyn King greeted the group and escorted them around the grounds, which covers three acres of lush tropical flora on the banks of the Alafia River near the McMullen Loop and Carmen del Rio Park. She charges \$5 per person to visit the sanctuary. Entry, however, is by appointment only. Often, she said, Biology or Veterinary students visit the site as part of their curriculum. Other groups, including conservationists, the Scouts and 4-H Clubs also visit. The money is used to help defray the cost of animal feed and other related expenses.



Cotton Topped Tamarin photo by Mariclaire Jones

Some of the animals are donated by Zoos, when the animals fail to thrive in that kind of environment. Others are donated by private owners, who can no longer care for the animals.

Currently, the sanctuary cares for a Crested African Porcupine, several Red Ruffed and Ring Tailed Lemurs from Madagascar. Cotton Topped Tamarins from Columbia, A male and female African Tortoise, and an elderly South American Tayra - a close relative of the North American Wolverine. An unusually quiet Australian Kookaburra eyed the Audubon Club visitors, as the group slowly walked past its enclosure. And, a quiet but inquisitive South American Coatimundi was sniffing the air for the unusual smells it picked up from the group.



American Coatimundi photo by John Perian

Wild Florida Sanctuary continued....

A Great Horned owl shared an enclosure with a male African Tortoise. The female tortoise doesn't like the male, so they have to live separate lives in different enclosures. The owl doesn't seem to mind. Its left wing is permanently incapacitated but it's able to hop from one perch to another, without any difficulty. And, they keep each other company but leave each other alone. A little further down the path is an enclosure for a Florida Gray Fox. The beautiful canine was taking a nap, so we moved on.

Another spacious enclosure was home to a pair of female South American Alpacas. Those are the only animals at the sanctuary that visitors are permitted to touch to feel the wool. The very, very expensive Alpaca Wool. It generally sells retail for about \$3.00 an ounce. The Alpacas seem to enjoy the human contact. And, unlike their Camel cousins, Alpacas usually have great dispositions. They don't bite or spit.



Australian Kookaburra photo by John Perian

All of the rescued animals are protected and permanently cared for. Some of them came from Zoos, because the animals were failing to thrive. Others came to the sanctuary because they had special care needs from private owners or other sources. None of them can be released into the wild, because many of them are non-native species. Primates like the sanctuary's lemurs, which are originally from the Island nation of Madagascar, could never be released here in Florida.



Wild Florida Sanctuary owner Robyn King with a Crested African Porcupine

The enclosures were spacious, clean and had ropes, platforms, and logs for climbing and perching. And each enclosure had smaller dwellings for the animals to use as den-like structures for resting or sleeping. The animals are given appropriate and healthy food. And, they get plenty of stimulation from other similar species. For example, there were several Red Ruffed and Ring Tailed Lemurs. And, because of the native tropical flora on the site, lots of Florida native birds often visit the sanctuary, including various owl species. It's not quite...but almost like home.



Club member Mariclaire Jones looks over sanctuary owner Robyn King's shoulder at a red Alpaca. photo by John Perian

More Photos from Sanctuary.....



*A North American Bobcat marking its territory
Photo by John Perian*



Close up of Bobcat by Mariclaire Jones



*A Madagascar Ring Tailed Lemur
Photo by John Perian*



*A south American Alpaca, a domesticated relative of
Llamas, Guanacos and Vicunas, and Camels from Asia
and Africa.*

We're on the road again!

Thanks to our many energetic and dedicated members we have an overnight field trip planned for 2024. This two-day/one-night trip will be to Wakulla Springs on March 4th, we will be staying overnight at the Wakulla Lodge in Crawfordville, FL

There will be a limited number of rooms available, so please see Ray Webb at the Field Trip table at our Saturday meeting on January 6 to leave a deposit for your room. Don't miss out on the fun. Sign up NOW.



Programs 2024

- 02/03/24 **Bugs in your Bloomers**
John Lampkin
- 03/02/24 **The Importance of Urban Forests**
Eric Muecke
COT Forester
- 04/06/24 **Florida Wildlife Corridor**
Marley Fuller
Wildlife Corridor



February 19th

Field Trips 2024

- 02/23/24 **The Celery Fields**
Sarasota, FL
- 03/28/24 **Venice Rookery**
Venice FL
- 04/17/24 **Fort Desoto County Park**
Pinellas County, FL

For information on Programs &
To sign up for 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.

Melanie Higgins

Executive Director of the Florida Turtle Conservation Trust speaks at the SCC Audubon Club's January Meeting

by John Perian

Photos by George Heinrich

Not everyone is an expert on conservation and ecology, or of birds, mammals and reptiles.

Even fewer people feel comfortable in the wilderness areas of Florida. Something as innocuous as the Suwannee Cooter is probably not really important to most Floridians.

To many people, a turtle is a turtle. Very few people even know the difference between each species. But, the Suwannee Cooter is a very large, hard shelled Florida turtle, that is extremely important to the environment.

Biologist and environmental educator George Heinrich has studied turtles for many years in our area, informing the public about the importance of this freshwater species.



St. Petersburg Field Biologist George Heinrich holds a Suwannee Cooter hatchling, in the course of his research of the turtle's presence and distribution in the Alafia River in southern Hillsborough County. The Suwannee is one of three other members of "Cooter" turtles in Florida and is the largest hard shell riverine turtles in North America.



The Suwannee Cooter is the largest freshwater river turtle in Florida. It can grow up to 18 inches long and weight almost 12 pounds at maturity. It only comes out of the water to make a nest and lay its eggs, or to bask in the sun on dead logs and rocks.

He was the guest speaker at the SCC Audubon Club's January 6th open meeting at the South Campus Community Hall. His presentation was about the fieldwork conducted of the Suwannee Cooter and its distribution in the Alafia River System of Hillsborough County.

The Alafia is a fairly swift flowing river in Eastern Hillsborough County, that stretches for 45 miles from Mulberry to Riverview, Florida, where it flows into Tampa Bay.

There are four primary species of the "Cooter," which got its name from the Geechee and Gullah African American people in the lowland coastal areas of the Carolina's, Georgia and far Northeastern Florida.

The turtle's moniker comes from the West African word "Kuta," which means turtle. Besides the Suwannee Cooter, the River Cooter, the Florida or Peninsula Cooter and the Red Bellied Cooter call Florida home. The Suwannee Cooter is the largest turtle of this family and can grow to a whopping 17-20 inches long, and can weigh up to 12 pounds.

The downside of being this big, Heinrich explained, was that it's sweet tasting meat has been on rural Floridians' menus for generations.

"This is almost a cultural type of thing," he said. "where people would go out and harvest (poach) 10-15 Cooters for a family dinner at Easter or other holidays.

(Cont'd on page 13)

(Cont'd from page 12)

These are big turtles with lots of meat on them. Unfortunately, he added. Turtles are eaten all over the world, and Florida is no exception. "Fortunately, here in Florida," he stressed, "many turtles including the Suwanee Cooter, the Alligator Snapping Turtle and the Soft Shelled Turtle are protected by law.

That doesn't always prevent people from following long established traditions. By ignoring the law, a poacher endangers the very existence of turtles and other wildlife.

It's not that outlandish to assume the Suwanee Cooter and other imperiled turtles could go the way of the North American Passenger Pigeon, the Ivory Billed Woodpecker, the Plains Grizzly Bear, the Red Wolf and other extinct and endangered animals.

Heinrich said that female Cooters are the most valuable member of the population. The Cooter can live up to 40 years. But, it takes about 10 years or so before they are able to begin laying eggs. Unfortunately, he said, most of the Cooters illegally taken in Florida for their meat are mature females. And, that puts a dent in the overall future population.

They usually lay clutches of about 20 eggs a couple of times a year. They crawl out of the rivers between March and August, to find soft sand, that gets adequate sunlight and is above the high-water line.

Along the Alafia River east of US Highway 301, most of the land along its banks is protected state, local and federal land. Unfortunately, a determined poacher will figure out a way to trap the Cooters. Heinrich said that, in 2004, he and his associates found the site of a turtle massacre near Cedar Key.

"The carcasses of 170 turtles were found hidden under leaf litter on about an acre of ground," he said. "About 164 or those 170 empty carapaces were of protected, hard shelled, river turtles. Most of them were of large, mature Suwanee Cooters."

The site of the large cache of river turtle shells Heinrich found near Cedar Key is about 50 miles southwest of Gainesville, Florida.

The Suwanee Cooter was first discovered in the Alafia River in 2014. A breeding population is now at home in that river basin. Many females have made their nests and deposited their eggs in people's backyards.

"Flyers were passed out to private residents along the Alafia, to make them aware of the Cooters' nesting habits," Heinrich said. "Many families were a great help during our seven year study of the Suwanee Cooter in that river."

Anyone who has ever tried to identify hard shelled freshwater river turtles knows how difficult that is. A common Snapping Turtle or a Mud Turtle is easy to distinguish. Their shape usually gives them away. But, not with the Cooters.

"The only time you might spot them," he said, "is when they are basking on a log or tree stump in the river. They are extremely fast and will dive into the water, before you're able to get close enough to identify them."

The next problem is the fact that there is very little difference between the Suwanee Cooter and the other three subspecies. They all have thin, yellow stripes along their head and neck. The margins along the sides of the Suwanee, between the carapace (back) and the plastron (belly), have doughnut shaped yellow markings.

Despite the difficulty identifying them, Heinrich said that, between 2016 and 2018, Suwanee Cooters were positively identified in the Alafia, Little Manatee, Manatee and the Phillippi Rivers. Researchers are currently studying turtles in the Myakka and Peace Rivers in southwest Florida.

"It's imperative to understand a species' geographic distribution, in order to implement management plans and other conservation efforts for threatened and endangered wildlife," he said.

The Suwanee Cooter is not just taking up space. It and other freshwater turtles are nature's garbage patrol. They scavenge and clean up sick or dead fish and other marine life from the rivers and other bodies of water.

(Cont'd on page 14)

(Cont'd from page 13)

Hatchlings and Juveniles are carnivorous and eat small fish and insects. When they mature, their diet becomes completely herbivorous. As adults, they usually eat problem aquatic plants, like Arrowhead, Coontail, Water Nymph and other submerged vegetation.

The younger, smaller Cooters are also prey for Raccoons, Crows, Otters, Coyotes, Fox, and Alligators. So, they play a significant ecological role in the riverine systems of the state.

Turtles have been on earth for more than 200 million years. The Southeastern United States is one of the richest areas in the world for turtle diversity. There are 30 different native turtle species here, including the Cooters, Snapping Turtles, Alligator Snappers, Diamond Back Terrapins, Softshell Turtles, Box Turtles, Gopher Tortoises, and five different Sea Turtle species.

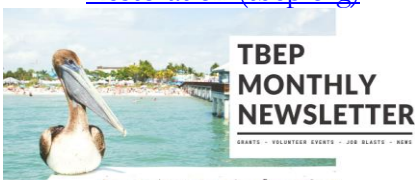
In the case of some species of turtles, there is another reason people should just leave them alone. There is currently a virus that is potentially deadly to two turtles in Florida. The "Turtle Fraservirus" is threatening Softshell and Red Bellied Slider Turtles. It can be transmitted to other wildlife. Leave them alone!

The bottom line then about the Suwanee Cooter and other wild turtles in the State are that they are all potentially endangered or imperiled. Chemical toxins and other pollution that drain into Florida's waterways, drainage of backwaters and flood control projects can isolate these backwater areas. That, in turn, can cause a decrease in the overall population.

Heinrich Ecological Services is based in St. Petersburg, Florida, and conducts wildlife surveys and research, natural history programming and nature-based tours.



[Tampa Bay Estuary Program - A Catalyst for Restoration \(tbep.org\)](http://tbep.org)



Officers & Committee Chairs 2024

<i>Co-Presidents</i>	<i>Nancy & Alan Renfrow</i>
<i>Programs Chairperson</i>	<i>Melanie Higgins</i>
<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Betty Giles</i>
<i>Co-Treasurers</i>	<i>Pam & George Viner</i>
<i>Immediate Past Pres.</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>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>
<i>At Large</i>	<i>Patsie Ginley</i>

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!**

February 2024

Peg Covert

Teri Brockway

Linda Cleveland

Arlene Halsted

Lorraine Novotny

Kitty Talcott

Ann Verth



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



www.sccaudubonclub.com

♥ Happy Valentines Day ♥