



# Sun City Center Audubon Club

February 2026

## *President's Corner*

Hope to see everyone in the Florida Room on February 7, 2026, at 9:30.

Our topic will be the Manatees at the TECO Manatee Viewing Area. Our field trip will also be to the Manatee Viewing Area.

At the January 22, 2026, supplemental CA Board meeting, our own Melanie Higgins (our Conservation Chair) gave a presentation to the board on the feasibility of installing a new trail on the north side of the canal opposite the current nature trail. It was well received and we hope to partner with the CA and make this a reality for the community. Everyone keep your fingers crossed.

## **REMINDER**

Membership dues are needed by the February meeting; we need to give our membership numbers to the CA in March.

Please bring your CA badges to the meeting with your new 2026 sticker attached, we need to verify this by March 15, so there are two meetings to show your sticker.

*Pam Viner*  
*President SCC Audubon Club*

**Happy Valentine's Day**



*Photo by Liz Congero*  
*Little Blue Heron on pond in Kings Point*

## **2025-26 Programs**

**February 7, 2026**

**Manatees**

Stan Kroh, Manager  
Land and Water Programs, TECO

**March 7, 2026**

**Biologist**

Cara Franceschini, MS  
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation  
Commission

**April 4, 2026**

**Alligators**

Kent A, Vliet, Ph.D.  
Coordinator of Laboratories,  
Department of Biology  
University of Florida

## ***Coming to the Nature Trail soon!***

Thanks to former CA Board member and Grant Writer, Nancy McCall, the CA was awarded a grant for improvements on the West Campus Nature Trails and has purchased two picnic tables and an additional eight benches. The new benches will be installed at appropriate locations at approximately equal distances along the trail. These benches will enhance the birding experience along the trail and encourage usage by those who would like to stop and enjoy just being outside in nature.

Thank you and enjoy!

***Melanie P. Higgins***  
***Florida Master Naturalist***

## ***TECO Manatee Viewing Center***

***Speaker: Stan Kroh***

***Meeting February 7, 2026***

TECO's Environmental Manager, Stan Kroh, will give a presentation about the company's Apollo Beach Manatee Viewing Center at the Sun City Center Audubon Club's monthly meeting Saturday morning, February 7th. His lecture will include information about the Florida "Sea Cows" and their annual winter journey to the clean, warmer waters that are discharged from Tampa Electric's Big Bend Power Plant in Apollo Beach.

Kroh will also discuss a little bit about the history of the Manatees and TECO's efforts over the years, to provide the marine mammals with a safe and comfortable environment during the winter months, when the coastal waters in the Tampa Bay area are significantly colder.



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He will also talk about TECO's Manatee Viewing Center, that includes raised boardwalks to better observe the aggregation of these usually solitary animals. The center also has a gift shop, a snack bar and educational information and displays.



Manatees generally migrate to areas of the state between November and April, where the water temperatures are a more consistent 72 degrees. These sites generally include easily accessible freshwater springs and waterways, as well as coastal waters near power plants in Florida. The rest of the state's waterways become significantly colder in winter, when the temperatures hover between the low to high 60's. That's much too cold for the warm-blooded animals. That's the reason they prefer to gather near Power Plants, that discharge warm water into the nearby bays and intracoastal waterways.

Kroh has been TECO'S Manager of Land and Stewardship Programs for the company for the past 16 years. He also chairs the Hillsborough Greenways Committee and serves as President of the Hillsborough River Watershed Alliance. He's a Registered Environmental Manager and a Certified Waste Management Professional.

Kroh will give his presentation in the Florida Room of the Atrium Building about 10:30, after club business and announcements.

Coffee, Tea and pastries will be available for club members and their guests, from 9:15am until 10:00am. Please bring your own cups and beverage mugs.

***John Perian***  
***SCC Audubon Club Publicity Chair***

## ***Felts Preserve - Palmetto, FL***

On a crisp, partly cloudy January day, 18 intrepid Audubon Club members headed out to Felts Preserve, an Audubon property in Palmetto. We were joined by Steve & Jan Burkholder from Eagle Audubon. We split into two groups and our group, led by Steve, walked around the lake, observing a few birds like the tufted titmouse and red-bellied woodpecker. We exchanged with the other group at the bird blind, where we heard a red-shouldered hawk and saw indigo and painted buntings, grackles, doves, and of course, squirrels.

The other group had an adventurous time on an overgrown trail and identified 11 different birds! Felts Preserve is lovely, with an easily accessible bird blind, bluebird houses, beehives, a garden of native plants, and a nice pavilion. After the walk, most of us went to Popi's by Port Manatee and had a nice lunch, while a few of us ended up at the Popi's in downtown Palmetto. All of the locations have great food and service. It was an enjoyable day for all.

***Sabine Prather***  
***Field Trips***



***Welcome to Sheri Cameron our new Vice President on the  
2026 SCC Audubon Board***

Sheri grew up in Vermilion, Ohio about a mile from Lake Erie. Migrating birds would rest in the woods behind her childhood home allowing her to frequently wake up to a cacophony of bird song. She earned money for college by working for the Lorain County Metroparks which expanded her love for wildlife and being outdoors. Her law enforcement career took her first to the Cleveland area and later to Columbus, Ohio. Sheri has searched for parks and outdoor experiences wherever she has lived. She retired and moved to Sun City Center in 2018. Sheri purposely bought a home on a retired golf course to continue watching wildlife and familiarizing herself with the birds found in Florida.



## *Felts Preserve Photos*



### ***SCC Audubon March Meeting, Florida Room - March 7, 2026***

#### **Cara Franceschini, MS, Biologist, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission**

Cara Franceschini grew up in New Jersey and has always been passionate about animals, the outdoors, and sharing her love of conservation with others. She went to North Carolina State University to obtain her Bachelor of Science and Master of Science in Fisheries, Wildlife, Conservation Biology. Her graduate studies focused on black bears (*Ursus americanus*), whilst she had many internships with different zoos, museums, and agencies. She was also a teaching assistant throughout her college years, so she enjoys helping people better understand the natural world and their role in protecting it.

Currently, she is a Gopher Tortoise Resource Biologist for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. In her presentation, Cara will be covering everything gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) related, from their unique behaviors and habitat to their importance as a keystone species and how we can help conserve them. She loves to keep her presentations engaging and fun for others, even those who may not be interested in conservation (yet). She is very excited to join us and hopes to see you there!

***Melanie P. Higgins***  
***Florida Master Naturalist***



## ***Conservation Committee Volunteers***

***Melanie P. Higgins***  
***Florida Master Naturalist***

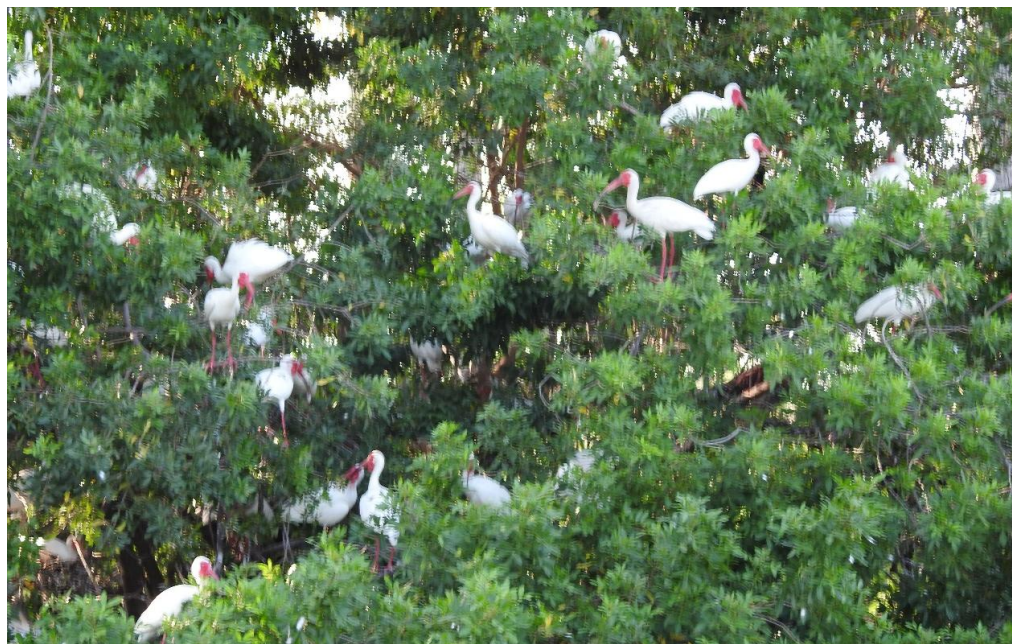
The Conservation Committee is looking for volunteers to assist in monthly wading bird surveys from March through July. These surveys are for Florida Audubon Colony Watch and take place at Middle Lake and North Lake Islands and at a small site in Kings Point.



Most importantly, we need one or more individuals living on Middle Lake and North Lake who are willing to volunteer their time AND boats to circle the islands to count nests. Additional volunteers are needed to count and identify birds in nests and record bird species data.

There will be a Zoom training meeting in early March followed by in person training on March 24<sup>th</sup>. Training is hosted by Audubon Florida.

Please contact Melanie Higgins, 813 625-1271, [melaniephiggins@gmail.com](mailto:melaniephiggins@gmail.com) for more information, or see me at the membership meeting on February 7<sup>th</sup>.





## February 2026

Mollie Allen  
Elena Aluotto  
Teri Brockway  
Sheri Cameron  
Angelo Cavaliere  
Linda Cleveland  
Peg Covert  
Betty Dean  
Phyllis Gannon  
Kim Jones  
Geoff Keightly  
Judith Kucera  
Cathy Meyerhoff  
Dennis Morris  
Joseph Mustion  
Margie Norris  
Deborah Ris  
Ronald Rosen  
Joanie Swartz  
Kathy Swayze  
Ann Verth

### *Reminder for Volunteers*

*If you are helping with setting up, please be at the hall 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 in December.*

### *Sun City Center Audubon Club Officers & Committee Chairs 2025-26*

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<i>President</i>	<i>Pam Viner</i>
<i>Vice President</i>	<i>Sheri Cameron</i>
<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Elisabeth Giles</i>
<i>Treasurer</i>	<i>George Viner</i>
<i>At Large</i>	<i>Linda Floyd</i>
	<i>Patsie Ginley</i>
<i>Field Trips</i>	<i>Sabine Prather</i>
<i>Master Birder</i>	<i>Ray Webb</i>
<i>Refreshments</i>	<i>Pat Dean</i>
<i>Historian</i>	<i>Clara Clancy</i>
<i>Membership</i>	<i>Joanie Swartz</i>
<i>Conservation</i>	<i>Melanie Higgins</i>
<i>Newsletter</i>	<i>Denise Rosen</i>
<i>Publicity</i>	<i>John Perian</i>
<i>Merchandise</i>	<i>Laura Butler</i>
<i>Name Tags</i>	<i>JoAnn Wilkinson</i>
<i>Previous President</i>	<i>Alan &amp; Nancy Renfrow</i>