



# Sun City Center Audubon Club

March 2026

## *President's Corner*

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

Our topic will be Gopher Tortoises, presented by Cara Franceschini, MS, Biologist, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

The Audubon Club is going to have a display table at Funfest on March 14. We will be highlighting the Nature Trail. We will have several baskets for a raffle and the funds raised from this will go to Nature Trail maintenance. Please stop by our table and take a chance.

The CA will be closing the Arts Building and Visitor Center parking on March 11-16. The Atrium will be closed March 12-16 for Funfest.

### **REMINDER**

Membership dues need to be paid ASAP; we need to provide our membership numbers to the CA in March. If you have not renewed your membership by March 15 we will be removing you from our newsletter list.

Please bring your CA badges to the meeting with your new 2026 sticker attached, we need to verify this by March 15. This is a REQUIREMENT of the CA.

We will be having a trip planning meeting on March 25; we would love to have some input from members.

*Pam Viner*  
**President SCC Audubon Club**

### ***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 March.*



### ***Upcoming Program***

**April 4, 2026**  
**Alligators**

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

## *News from our Master Birder*

*Ray Webb*

We are coming to the end of the winter season. I hope you have been enjoying the Florida sun and the beaches, especially you snowbirds who have left northerly climes to avoid ice, snow and cold.

Yeah, right This hasn't been a normal winter, even for Florida. At least it's better here than, say, the East coast! But fear not. Spring isn't far away, and bird migration has been proceeding since the beginning of the year!

January saw the arrival of purple martins, our earliest 2026 returnees. Males arrived first; scouts came to establish nesting sites, followed by the females a few weeks later. Purple martins are almost exclusively dependent on artificial sites, usually gourds or "apartment" structures we erect for them. The Celery Fields, located in Sarasota, has a healthy population of these, our largest swallow species, at the Visitor Center. Some of you may have erected martin houses, and they should be receiving attention by now.

During February, a few species of songbirds arrive, such as Northern parula warblers, red-eyed vireos, and Louisiana waterthrush among others. A walk at our Nature Trail, located on West Del Webb Blvd. may prove fruitful.



March begins the major Spring migration, with a trickle of many species. But I look forward to the arrival of swallow-tailed kites most of all; they are showing up now. These graceful insect-eating raptors will grace our skies in increasing numbers as March proceeds. I love to see them overhead! Other March arrivals include chuck-will's widows (active from dusk to dawn, calling their name and devouring insects) and great-crested flycatchers.

April marks the height of spring migration, with warblers, orioles, tanagers, grosbeaks and others passing through. Fort Desoto Park in mid-April is one of the best places in the country for spring migration!

Rather than looking back at our cold, blustery winter, let's look forward to warmer days and lots of birds!



# Manatee Lecture by Stan Kroh 2/7/26 Meeting

*By John Perian  
Audubon Club Publicity Chairman*

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to call Stan Kroh Tampa Electric Company's "Manatee Man." As TECO's Environmental Manager, he is the company's expert on the marine mammals that congregate near the warm water discharge flows from the Big Bend Power Plant in Apollo Beach. Kroh also monitors the visitor friendly "Manatee Viewing Center" adjacent to the power plant.

Before he started his presentation about Florida's Manatees, he showed the audience what looked like a box of graveyard bones. They were the skeletal remains of something big. But not from any graveyard remains that people are familiar with. His specimens were examples of "Pachyostotic Bones," exceptionally thick and dense bones that lack marrow. A Manatee's bones are that kind of bone and act like ballast in a ship, to help them maintain neutral buoyance in the state's shallow waters, where they feed on sea grass.



He first pulled out the rather heavy, dense upper skull of a deceased Manatee. "First, I'm going to pass around the upper part of the skull," he said, "but what I especially want you to notice are the teeth."

"Manatees have something called 'Marching Molars.'" The teeth come in at the back of the jaw and gradually work their way to the front of the mouth. Eventually, the teeth fall out and are replaced."



"When you mentioned you were a sea cow, I wasn't expecting this."

As you know, they feed primarily on sea grass," "and they eat grass all day long, so they're constantly grinding their teeth. Because of that, he said their teeth wear out. Manatees are constantly getting new teeth all the time."

After he passed the top portion of the skull, Kroh showed everyone the lower portion of the skull. The same principle applied to the molars on the bottom jaw, he said. Everyone remarked how heavy both parts of the skull were.

He next brought out a clear, plastic pallet with the assembled bones of a Manatee flipper. They very closely resembled the bones of a human's hand, albeit much larger. That shouldn't be a surprise, he said, because Manatees and people are mammals. We all share similar traits, including the need to breathe air.

Kroh reminded everyone that, at one time, Manatees were land dwelling mammals. And their flippers were originally developed for walking rather than swimming.

Despite their large size and amount of insulating fatty tissue, local Manatee populations are sensitive to fluctuations in sea water temperatures. Florida's winters can cause the temperature to drop as low as 52-degrees.

The "Sea Cows" start to succumb to what's called "Cold Stress Syndrome," when the temperature in the water dips below 68 degrees. It's like "hypothermia" in people. It can cause skin lesions and an abscess, that look like patches of bleached skin. Cold stress can also cause Manatees to develop digestive issues and immune system suppression, due to prolonged exposure to cold.

## Cont'd Manatee Lecture



When Fall and Winter water temperatures begin to drop, Manatees seek out warmer water areas throughout the State. Most of Florida's natural springs have a fixed temperature of about 72 degrees. As a result, hundreds of Manatees head for places like Three Sisters Springs, near Crystal River, Blue Springs State Park in Volusia County, Kings Bay/Crystal River in Citrus County, and Homosassa Springs Wildlife State Park, also in Citrus County north of Tamps. The "Sea Cows" also aggregate around the warm water discharged from Power Plants, like TECO's Big Bend Coal Fired Plant, in Apollo Beach.

Kroh then talked about TECO's Manatee Viewing Center adjacent to its power plant. "It's a wonderful facility," he said. "It's free admission and free parking. And this is probably one of the last places in Florida that can say that."

TECO is celebrating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in December of its Manatee Viewing Area. That's four decades of caring for Manatees seeking warm water protection from the winter cold. Tampa Electric Company has been providing viewing of marine mammals and presenting educational information about them for the public since it opened in 1986. The viewing center season to observe the manatees from a safe distance is open from November 1<sup>st</sup> through April 15<sup>th</sup> each year.

"That's really because it's when the cooler weather descends on our area, and you're more likely to see large aggregations of Manatees taking advantage of TECO's warm water discharge. That warm water flows into the canal bordering the plant. The Manatees then swim alongside their neighbors and start to warm up."

Kroh said almost 10 million people have visited the Viewing Center since it opened. That's a lot of visitors for such a small facility, he added. Last season, more than 1,100 Manatees enjoyed the warm water in the plant's discharge canal. Some of the female cows bring their young calves with them.

"Manatees and their related species are found in various parts of the world," he said. "Though they are typically in more tropical areas. In summer, Florida's male Manatees are known to swim as far north as New England during the summer months and as far west as Corpus Christi, Texas." Kroh said that, sometimes, if they don't turn around and head back south before it gets too cold, they have to be rescued and flown back to Florida.

Florida's Manatees are a subspecies of the West Indian Manatee. They are native here and are considered a "threatened" marine mammal. In 2018, one estimate placed the number of Florida Manatees at around 6,000.

"A few years ago, we had a petty major die off of Manatees on the east coast of Florida and the Indian River Lagoon", Kroh said. "Because a lot of polluted water from Lake Okeechobee was released into the lagoon, it caused a massive algae bloom."

That blocked out the sun in the sea grass beds in that area. Subsequently, the grasses died. That, in turn, caused hundreds of Manatees to starve. Fortunately, as he explained, those kinds of issues aren't that much of a problem on our west coast.

In addition, Manatees have a very low reproductive rate. They typically have just one calf at a time and are pregnant for 13 months. "Then they give birth to a 60-pound calf. So, for those of you who have children, you're probably glad you aren't a Manatee." That comment elicited more than a few chuckles.

The Big Bend power plant can use natural gas or coal to generate electricity. But water from the bay that is used by the plant and then discharged into the nearby canal can only be warmed to the right temperature for Manatees by burning coal. That's done during the cold season. Kohl said that coal is much more efficient and less expensive at heating the discharge water than natural gas.



***Manatee Viewing Center***  
***Ariel view by Jamie Woodlee-Administrator of Viewing Center***

Both males and females eat at least 10-percent of their body weight every day. That's about 150 pounds of grazed sea grass. While sea grass is their primary food source, they have been known to eat mangrove leaves and other vegetation along the banks of the bay, rivers and estuaries. An average sized male Manatee weight about 1,200 pounds and can reach a length of about 10 feet. Females are generally bigger than males.

When not eating or moving from one spot to another a Manatee generally sleeps. They must surface to exhale and breathe once every 20 minutes. They are also generally solitary and don't congregate with other "sea cows," except in winter and when mating. Another point in their favor is the fact that they don't have many natural predators. Most sharks and alligators leave them alone.

At some point in the future, most of today's power plants that can burn coal will cease to exist. Then what will happen to Manatees in winter? Kroh said some experts have suggested trying to modify the animals' behavior. Try to teach them to migrate to Florida's natural spring refuges, rather than continue to rely on a power plant that discharges warm water. "I'm doubtful how well that will work," he said. "But we'll see.

The Manatee Viewing Center's raised boardwalks and ramp from street level to the boardwalks are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

They are easily accessible to the free parking lots. The overflow parking area also has a couple of golf carts, to transport visitors from the overflow lot to the viewing center and back. Only trained service animals are allowed on site.

The Center includes a 50-foot observation tower, raised boardwalks overlooking the warm water discharge canal next to the power plant, where the Manatees congregate in winter. There are also nature trails, a "touch tank," where visitors can see and touch Cow Nose Rays, a manatee movie, 900-foot-long tidal walk, that juts out 150 feet into the lagoon, and a butterfly garden. And, the site also has a café with snacks, a gift shop and clean restrooms. Everything is free, except the gift shop and café.

The Manatee Viewing Center is the anchor attraction for the Florida Conservation and Technology Center, a public-private partnership between TECO, the Florida Aquarium, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and the University of Florida. The FCTC includes Manatee Viewing Center, TECO's Clean Energy Center, Florida Aquarium's Coral Conservation Center and the Sea Turtle Rehabilitation center, as well as the FWC Florida Youth conservation Center and the FWC Fish Hatchery.

***Cont'd Manatee Lecture***

The Florida Coral Conservation Center is dedicated to breeding and preserving live corals, to help replenish dead stands of coral called “Ghost Reefs” that have been killed by the water borne highly infectious Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease. Extreme heat waves in summer caused by climate change have also adversely affected Florida’s coral reefs.

The 19,000 square foot Sea Turtle Rehab and Veterinary suite is also part of the center. There is also the FWC’s Marine Fisheries Enhancement Center on site, that focuses on spawning and raising recreational fishing stocks, especially Red Drum (Redfish) and Spotted Sea Trout. A half million fingerlings of each species are released each year into Tampa Bay.

The Conservation and Tech Center is located on a 20-acre campus, within 500 acres of land that includes the Manatee Viewing Center. Visitors who also want to visit the Conservation Center can take a shuttle from the Manatee Viewing center to the FCTC. Hours and dates of operation are the same as the Manatee Viewing Center.

The Canoe Outpost in Wimauma also provides canoe and kayak rentals at the Apollo Beach/Newsman Creek mangrove tunnels and surrounding waterways, near the Manatee Viewing Center.

RSVP is highly recommended. They can be contacted at 813-634-2228.

***More Photos from Viewing center***

***by Alan Renfrow***



***Tri-Color Night Heron***



***Sheepshead cleaning Manatee's skin***

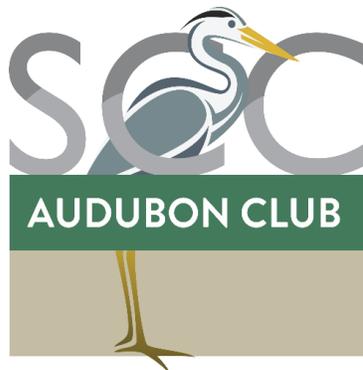


**Manatee with propeller wounds on its back**



March 2026

- Roselyn Cruthis
- Pat Dean
- Carolyn Deming
- Beverly Feindt
- Drake Folliett
- Tina Folliett
- Marshia Hall
- Mariclaire Jones
- Ron Matelski
- Sandy McCaw
- Pati Messicic
- John Perian
- Thomas Perusse
- Catherine Petit
- Todd Wizelman



[www.sccaudubonclub.com](http://www.sccaudubonclub.com)

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

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