

Peace River Audubon Society

# White Bird

November 2008      Volume 32, Issue 3  
Sandy Artman, Editor  
Dan Artman, Dispatcher



www.PeaceRiverAudubon.org

## 2008-09 OFFICERS & DIRECTORS:

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	George Ruby '10	941-423-0174
	Don Youso '10	941-235-1298
	Starr Zachritz '10	941-766-7686

### Next Meeting November 20, 2008 at 6:30 PM Speaker, Julie Morris

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church 2565 Tamiami Trail,  
Port Charlotte (just south of Midway)

On November 20, 2008 come see Julie Morris who will talk about gopher tortoise and how the new regulations may affect tortoise conservation in Florida. Julie is currently the director of Wildlands Conservation, a local nonprofit. Julie has worked in the conservation field for over 12 years as a field biologist, research scientist, program coordinator and environmental educator.



### A Message from the President by Cathy Olson



The date has been set for the PRAS Christmas Bird Count! This year the Christmas Bird Count will be held on Sunday December 14, 2008. You don't have to be an expert birder to participate. Drivers, list makers and spotters are also needed. While the

Christmas Bird Count is primarily about collecting data, we also have a lot of fun and develop new friendships. Please contact Tony Licata as soon as possible so he may assign you to a team ([Alicata@dewis.com](mailto:Alicata@dewis.com)).

Just last week we received confirmation that the annual banquet keynote address will be about whooping cranes. This is especially important since the whooping cranes are now migrating to Florida with the assistance of an ultra light plane and a bit of human help. Be sure to mark your calendar for the event on March 19, 2008. Former Board member Mary Ann Hughes and current Board member Starr Zachritz successfully booked Benedettos, a local Punta Gorda restaurant, for the event. The Board is pleased both at the great location and the guest speakers.



### November 15th Field Trip Carlton Reserve & Laurel Rd Landfill By Stu Lewis

At Carlton we should get a good look at several red headed woodpeckers. Other birds could include pileated and other woodpeckers, bluebirds, pine warblers, and other song birds. A short stop at the parking lot of The Sleeping Turtle Preserve could yield a few warblers. This year the wetland on Laurel Rd just before entering the landfill should be very productive since there has been plenty of rain this summer. We could see spoonbills, snipes, bitterns, most of the herons and egrets, and other wading birds and ducks. Throughout the landfill itself, there are many wet areas where we should get good close-up views of most of the wading birds. We should also see hawks, several eagles, warblers, various song birds including meadowlarks. Meet at the West location at 7 AM and bring a lunch. (Charlotte Stadium on Rt. 776). Any questions call Stu or Louise Lewis at 235-2590.

### December 2nd Walkabout— Sleeping Turtles Preserve Led by Stu Lewis

Please join us on Tuesday, December 2nd for our next Walkabout at Sleeping Turtles Preserve North at 3462 Border Rd, Venice. To get to Sleeping Turtles Preserve from northbound I-75, take exit 193 and turn right. Proceed north 1/2 mile on Jacaranda Blvd. to the stop sign and turn right onto Border Road. Proceed approximately 3 miles east on Border Road. As you approach the bridge over the Myakka, the Sleeping Turtles Preserve parking lot will be on the left. The preserve is home to numerous subtropical plants, as well as the American alligator, peninsula cooter, woodland warblers and wading birds. Any questions call Stu or Louise Lewis at 235-2590.



Do you have some spare time to donate? Peace River Audubon consistently gets calls from festival organizers who want to help us get our message across. This month alone we received requests from three groups.

Please contact me if you have time and would be willing to help at one of these events including the Charlotte Harbor Nature Festival on November 22, 2008. Did you know that the Charlotte Harbor Nature Festival was originally thought of by Randy McCormick, PRAS past President and Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center employee? If a more active type of volunteering is your speed how about helping maintain Audubon Pennington Park? Contact Larry Linn if you can volunteer: [Linn59@comcast.net](mailto:Linn59@comcast.net).

## October Walkabout Report - CHEC By Phyllis Cady

Flooded trails couldn't keep our Walkabout at Charlotte Harbor Environmental Center from being successful. That's because the nature lovers that attend enjoy being out and about no matter what! We had a suspicion that the trails would be wet, as it had rained 2 - 3 inches the night before, so we took our time along the dry paths looking for signs of fall. The beauty-berry, winged sumac, and virginia creeper were so colorful, and wildflowers, such as crotalaria, white milkweed, and frostweed were everywhere. At the Caniff Building we stopped to just delight in the view, and were lucky to see 2 sandhill cranes fly over the pond, and a cooper's hawk resting in a pine tree. We had already been out for an hour, by the time we arrived at Three-Lakes Trail, only to discover that it was flooded. We had to turn back, but took another leisurely walk to return to our cars. We never did take the designated route, but as usual, there is always plenty to see at CHEC. Other birds that we saw along the way were northern flickers, belted kingfishers, pileated and red-bellied woodpeckers, catbirds, white ibis and more. Hopefully all of the participants will return to CHEC to enjoy a drier, winter walk. There are guided walks every weekday at 10:00 AM, starting in November.



## October Field Trip Report - Celery Fields By Don Youso

Although we had a small turnout for our trip to Celery Fields the seven fortunate participants who traveled to Celery Fields for our initial field trip of the season, were blessed with a beautiful, sunny Fall day, and some great birding. After scanning for birds from the Gazebo in Celery Fields, we walked the dikes around the ponds and were able to get good looks at a number of special birds. We saw more than 55 species there, including the following: Northern Harrier, Belted Kingfisher, Roseate Spoonbill, Swamp Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, Black Bellied Whistling Ducks, Blue-winged Teal, Sedge Wren, King Rail (heard), Limpkin, Lesser Yellowlegs, Least Sandpipers, Forsters Tern, Royal Tern, and White and Glossy Ibis. After completing our walk at Celery Fields the group went to Pinecraft Park in Sarasota to look for late migrant warblers. At Pinecraft Park we spotted an American Redstart, Blue-grey Gnatcatcher, Brown Thrasher, and a Barred Owl. The group also spotted an American Kestrel on the wires while traveling back from Sarasota. Our total species count for the trip was 64, and we enjoyed a great day of birding. See you out there on our next PRAS trip!



## A Fall Project—Putting up a Bluebird Box By Mike Krzyzkowski

Bluebirds are small beautifully colored thrushes that once were as common as robins in the north. They are cavity nesters and their numbers have declined greatly as competition for nesting sites increased from starlings and house sparrows, and along with habitat loss, removal of dead tress, and the shift from wooden to metal fence posts. Recently their numbers have begun to bounce back with the placement and maintenance of artificial nest boxes in an appropriate habitat. A series of boxes can be grouped into a “bluebird trail” as long as they’re spread about 75 – 100 yards apart as this is their feeding territory.



Bluebirds will return to the same nesting site year after year and will usually raise 2 or more broods every year – thereby increasing the local population greatly. I’ve had the good fortune to maintain a trail of about 18 boxes on a friend’s dairy farm and around my home when I was living in NJ. On return visits the bluebird population is still abundant, and it was no problem to encourage others to maintain the boxes every year.

Florida has excellent bluebird habitat! The reason for this has to do with their feeding habits. Bluebirds will perch and feed by sight on ground crawling insects. Hence the boxes need to be located nearby to areas of short grass – for example cow pastures, golf courses, orange groves, alongside country roads, etc. Back yard lawns will do as long as there are available trees or fences to perch on. Boxes need to be placed about in the open about 4 – 8 feet above the ground. Fence posts, telephone poles, or their own post will do nicely. Trees are generally not a good site as they will attract other birds such as wrens. An excellent website for further information is the North American Bluebird Society at [www.nabluebirdsociety.org](http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org). There you can find plans for several types of approved nestboxes listed under “bluebird facts”. I prefer the Eastern or Western Bluebird Nestbox for its simplicity and ease of construction. Be sure to check out “predator control” in this section as raccoons can wreck havoc with the nestlings. I’m going to try the “Noel Guard” listed under “Entrance Hole Guards” this year. If you wish to buy a ready made bluebird box the critical dimensions are an entrance hole of exactly 1 ½ inch (smaller no good and larger will admit starlings), and an interior floor of 5 x 5 inches.

Bluebirds begin nesting as early as February – April for the first brood and will raise a second or even a third brood during their nesting season. After this, they will form loose family groups in search of food and may winter over if there is an available food source – usually berries. It’s never too early to get your box(es) up as these family flocks will move through while foraging. They’ll inspect the box only to return and use them when nesting season arrives.

Bluebirds are the most pleasant and beautiful backyard companions! Good luck and talk to me if you need any advice.

## November Walkabout Report—Ollie's Pond By Don Youso

There was a good turnout for the birdwalk at Ollie's Pond on November 4th and it was a very productive morning. Despite the cool morning, the grey and overcast skies and no sunshine, a total of 22 individuals participated. With some sharp-eyed birders in our group we ended our morning with a total species count of 33. We saw a number of winter migrants as well as some other great birds. Our bird count included Gray Catbird, Immature Bald Eagle, Pied-billed Grebe, American Kestrel, a pair of Great Horned Owls, Eastern Phoebe, Ringed-necked Ducks, Blue-winged Teal, Pine, Palm, and Yellow-rumped Warblers, a pair of Pileated Woodpeckers, American Coot, and Common Yellow-throat. Perhaps the best bird of the day was a Hermit Thrush that was very cooperative and remained visible and stationary for an extended period of time affording all great views of the bird. Most participants got good views through the spotting scope. One individual was able to take some pictures with a digital camera though the spotting scope. The Hermit Thrush was a life bird for several participants.



### Donate to PRAS and give a gift to future generations

Your gifts are tax deductible and will help PRAS carry out its mission to protect the air we breathe, water we drink, and wildlife we love.

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- College Scholarship Fund \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 To encourage exceptional college students interested in a career in the environmental sciences.
- Audubon Adventures \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
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- PRAS General Needs \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 Such as Audubon-Pennington Park, festival displays, literature printing, or based on need any of the funds above.

Send this form along with your gift to  
 PRAS at P.O. Box 510760, Punta Gorda, FL 33951  
 or call Cathy Olson at 941-613-6753

## Walkabouts and Field Trips 2008-2009



- November 15: *Field Trip* Carlton Reserve  
 Stu and Louise Lewis \*West
- December 2: *Walkabout* Sleeping Turtle  
 Stu and Louise Lewis
- December 14: Christmas Bird Count  
 Tony Licata
- January 6: *Walkabout* Amberjack  
 Chuck and Joan Froman
- January 17: *Field Trip* Harns Marsh  
 Cathy Olson \*South
- February 3: *Walkabout* Yucca Pens  
 Eleanor Marr
- February 21: *Field Trip* Palm Island  
 Kevin Edwards \*West
- March 3: *Walkabout* Tippe II  
 Stu and Louise Lewis
- March 21: *Field Trip* Babcock-Webb  
 Dave Lancaster (meet at entrance station)
- April 7: *Walkabout* Shell Creek Preserve  
 Eleanor Marr
- April 18: *Field Trip* Fort DeSoto  
 Eleanor Marr \*North
- May 5: *Walkabout* TBA  
 Phyllis Cady
- May 16: *Field Trip* TBA  
 Mike Krzyzkowski/Jim Bonk

\*NORTH—the parking lot by McDonalds at Peachland Mall near 175 and Kings Hwy in Port Charlotte (24133 Peachland Boulevard)  
 \*SOUTH—the parking lot of Sweetbay on US 41 south of the Burnt Store Road intersection in Punta Gorda (10175 Tamiami Trail)  
 \*EAST - the parking lot of Winn-Dixie on State Route 17 east of Punta Gorda (27680 Bermont Road)  
 \*WEST the parking lot of Charlotte Stadium, Rt. 776

## 2008-2009 Speaker Schedule



- November 20: Julie Morris - Natural History of the Gopher Tortoise
- December 18: Marianne Korosy - Southwest Florida Sparrows  
 Holiday Potluck
- January 15 : Tony Licata - Christmas Bird Count results
- February 19: John Cassani - Frogs and Frogwatch of Southwest FL
- March ??: Annual Banquet, silent auction and photo contest
- April 16: Gil MacAdam - Southwest FL Butterflies & their habitats
- May 21 : Members night: PRAS members present slides and stories

The Peace River Audubon Society  
PO Box 510760  
Punta Gorda, FL 33951-0760

Non-profit Organization  
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Check the "Exp" date on your address label!  
"1208" means your PRAS and/or National membership expires  
December 2008. To save the cost of sending reminders, **please**  
use the application below to renew your membership. If you  
have questions please call Phyllis Cady at 575-4009 or send an  
email to: membership1@peacriveraudubon.org

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED



Printed on Recycled Paper  
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The Peace River Audubon Society is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization. Our Federal tax ID number is 59-2190872. We do not engage a professional solicitor and 100% of the funds generated by this request will be used to support our Chapter programs. Our registration number with the FDA Division of Consumer Services is SC-040701.

Bird of the Month: Eastern Towhee by Cathy Olson, PRAS Board President

The eastern towhee (formerly rufous-sided towhee) is a familiar woodland bird in our area. During the winter we have migratory individuals in addition to resident birds. This large sparrow is sexually dimorphic; the back, hood, wings and tail on the males are black, while those on the females are brown. The rest of the plumage is similar between the sexes; they have rufous sides, a white belly, and a white spot on their wings. Amazingly, we can often tell which individuals are resident and which are migratory. The resident birds have whitish-yellow eyes, while the migratory birds have red eyes. Towhees prefer shrubby areas such as forest edges with open ground where they can scratch in the ground for seeds and insects.



## Peace River Audubon Society Membership Application / Renewal

Join us for some fun and birding. Help protect the air we breathe, the water we drink, & the wildlife we love...help us protect Florida.

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 Renewal

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- \$20 Local Audubon Membership Only  
Includes the "White Bird" newsletter with local news articles,  
local meetings, field trips, bird walks, & special events.  
All proceeds stay within local chapter
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