

White Bird

May 2009 Volume 32, Issue 9

Sandy Artman, Editor

Dan Artman, Dispatcher



www.PeaceRiverAudubon.org

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**Next Meeting: May 21, 2009 6:30 PM
Members Night**

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

Come join PRAS members as they share photographs and stories from the year. Bring a CD with your favorite photos, a power point presentation, prints and stories to share. In addition to photos and stories our annual election of officers and board members will be held.



Fort DeSoto Field Trip Report By Eleanor Marr

Twenty-six people took the long trip to Ft. DeSoto on a beautiful sunny day. Once again, PRAS was incredibly lucky to pick a day when migrants were plentiful. Everyone was thrilled to see gorgeous Scarlet and Summer Tanagers, Blue and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Indigo Buntings, and Orchard Orioles. Four kinds of thrushes were migrating through, with Swainson's Thrush the most commonly seen. Noisy Black-hooded Parakeets flew overhead in groups or perched in nearby trees. Many different warbler species were present that day, and we added 14 to our trip list, though not everyone got to see each kind. A yellow-billed Cuckoo, and a female Painted Bunting were among the more exciting species seen by only a few on the trip. We spent the entire morning and well into the afternoon at the mulberry tree area, a Ficus tree bearing fruit at Park Headquarters, and East Beach picnic area and trails. Birding was so good there that only a few ventured out to North Beach for shorebirds late in the afternoon, and a lengthier trip list was sacrificed to spend time enjoying and photographing the passerines. However, 78 species is a very respectable number.

BOARD MEMBER and OFFICER ELECTIONS

The nominating committee is pleased to present the following slate of board members and officers:

Board members: Larry Behren, Jim Comfort, Chuck Steele.
Officers: President: Cathy Olson, Vice-President: Stu Lewis,
Treasurer: Don Yuoso and Secretary: Sandy Artman.

A confirmation election will be held at the May general meeting and other nominees may be made.

Thanks to all the Board members who have donated countless hours to make PRAS run. Extra special thanks to Walt Williams who has been the PRAS Treasurer since 2005.

May 16 Field Trip - Highlands Hammock Led by Mike Krzyzkowski

Please join us for our next field trip to Highlands Hammock State Park, one of Florida's oldest parks on Saturday, May 16. We will be meeting at the East meeting place by the Winn-Dixie. Highlands Hammock State Park is located off US 27 on SR 634 (also known as Hammock Road), four miles west of Sebring.



Shell Creek Preserve Walkabout Report By Eleanor Marr

Shell Creek Preserve is one of the newer protected lands in Charlotte County. Walkabouts generally meet on site, but on April 7 we carpoled as the park is not yet well marked and the gate to the property is locked (though one can enter through a pedestrian gate and walk ~1/2 mile to the trails). The trip got off to a shaky start as one carload of people was inadvertently left behind. Thanks to cell phones, that was rectified, and a late-comer at the locked gate was able to join us as well! Seventeen people walked the trails and enjoyed the birds and plant life. Paw-paw was in bloom, but we were disappointed not to see the Zebra Swallowtail that lays its eggs on that plant. It was very windy that day. The difference between our usual Slash Pine and Longleaf Pine was readily seen as the "white candles" of the Longleaf Pine found there were on display. Twenty-five species of birds were seen. Highlights included Purple Gallinule, Swallow-tailed Kite and Yellow-throated Warbler.



When Good Fire Says Good Morning By Michael Weston, CFA Senior Forester

On a lazy morning somewhere in southwest Florida, the lazy crackle of a fire burns in the underbrush. A team of people in yellow Nomex fire gear diligently tend to the fire with back-pack water sprayers, drip torches that carefully spout fire, and an arsenal of hand tools that can easily reach down into the soil to create a bare dirt line that is hard for a fire to cross. A rider on an ATV with a water tank mounted on the vehicle patrols back and forth to monitor the fire's progress. All the while, the burn team's radios crackle and beep as they talk back and forth to each other about weather conditions and slowly tick off the various steps of the burn plan they are following. A local fire department truck and firefighters sit with an every watchful eye over by the nearby houses next to freshly plowed fireline. The fire, doing what fire always does, calmly ducks and weaves its way through the pine forest, leaving some areas unburned, but also turning dead leaves and vegetation into home-grown, natural fertilizer for the forest to use. A tractor from the Florida Division of Forestry sits next to the transport that brought it to the forest early in the morning, its work having been completed to circle the day's burn area with new fireline.



People in general have very different view of fires that depend heavily on the context that the fire is located within along with the person's experiences with fire. In most all cases, there is never a good, planned house fire, with the exception being a house fire for training purposes. In a house/structure fire, property is damaged, people's lives are displaced or worse. Put that same force inside a fireplace or in a

wood fired cooking stove, and the sustained chemical reaction that fire constitutes becomes extremely useful and productive. The best way to cook a delicious pizza is over a wood fire. The same dichotomy is true with wildfires. The untrained and/or careless person near a woody area who tosses aside a cigarette butt, randomly disposes of hot grill ashes, burns landscaping cuttings on a windy day, or leaves a campfire unmonitored can create the uncontrolled, raging wildfire that so many people are accustomed to seeing on the news. Worse still, the high number of lightning strikes in southwest Florida each year are perfect fire starters in our woods. Just as in a house fire, a wildfire can change people's lives by causing injury or worse, along with damaging property. There are, however, situations where trained and caring people put fire to use to achieve finite goals, mainly in the form of prescribed fires.

A prescribed fire is similar to the prescription that a doctor would write for a person, only a prescribed fire is used to treat certain conditions that occur in natural and woody areas. In both cases, a check-up occurs, only in the case of a prescribed fire, the plot of land doesn't drive to an office for the appointment (nor is there a co-pay). Prior to a prescribed fire, a land manager with titles varying from forester to farmer to biologist to landowner will visit the property to determine what needs to be done on it. Examples can be: are more trees desired; do we want more room for quail to roam around; do the cows need more grass to graze; do I want more room to walk around? A prescribed fire uses a burn plan to answer the preceding questions and takes into account the surrounding buildings (schools, nursing homes, hospitals) that will be sensitive to smoke along with nearby roadways and minimizes the impact any smoke generated from the fire will have on these facilities. Following the selection of a wind direction for the burn to avoid these facilities, the land manager then chooses from a whole series of techniques and weather conditions to burn a piece of land so that the fire is just right and moves at a speed that is appropriate. For instance, a fire that is too hot and slow will kill an excessive number of trees. A fire that is too cool and fast may not consume the right amount of trees, plants, and dead vegetation. Think of it as taking just the right amount of medication for a disease as prescribed by a doctor, or setting the oven to the right temperature to bake a pie.

Prescribed burns actually have legal hours of operation in the state of Florida, so the fire starts up, the smoke rises from the flames, and in the same day, the fire is stopped from moving and in many cases put out. Essentially, with a prescribed fire, people are able to plan around it, if they would like to avoid the smoke.

In the case of many of the forests and natural areas around southwest Florida, some amount of fire is required to keep the ecosystem healthy. Prescribed fire can create the following benefits:

- Creates a checkerboard pattern of more mature plant communities with younger fire dominated plant communities (i.e. mixing pine forests, cypress forests, and oak hammocks). On the larger scale, the mixing of different forest types is a lot more productive for wildlife
- Encourages the growth of plants for wildfire forage, especially for gopher tortoises and scrub jays. New growth following fires is very succulent or more berry production is encouraged
- Creates suitable conditions for new seeds to grow, esp. pine seed
- Creates lower fuel levels that will lead to a boring, less intense wildfire if one occurs on the property later. Burning safely now does actually make future wildfires less dangerous because there is less to burn and the fire is easier to put out
- Protects nearby homes by consuming flammable natural vegetation
- Minimal soil nutrients are tossed into the air
- Smoke particles are smaller and less numerous than wildfires
- Keep wildlife food levels at appropriate heights for wildlife
- Kill off certain invasive plants that invade native plant communities.

WAIT!! Doesn't Smokey Bear say to prevent wildfires? Now we are starting fires, so what gives? The answer is that land managers are starting prescribed fires, not wildfires. A wildfire is a fire that is out of control. In southwest Florida, 40% of our wildfires are caused by lightning. The area is designed to burn and will burn. In a wildfire there is no plan or care taken – there is just vegetation that will burn along with an ignition source. Wildfires can be very fast and do not do a competent job of helping anyone out. On average in Lee County, 3,500 acres burn each year in wildfires. One wildfire can destroy hundreds or thousands of acres of trees and natural areas in southwest Florida, with the damage taking upwards of a decade to get repaired as new trees grow and the soil re-accumulates. One wildfire can cause hundreds of people to have to evacuate their homes and chance losing almost everything. One wildfire can cause smoke to linger in the air for days or weeks on end and impair vision on roadways. One wildfire can cause injury to people, pets, and animals, including firefighters. Each year, we see out of control wildfires that require lots of people to help put them out. Out of control, costly, and dangerous wildfires are what will happen if we have less prescribed fire. A little smoke and fire applied in a planned way now, can mean a lot less smoke and danger later on, and the forest and other natural areas are a lot better off than before.



For more information on prescribed fire or how to make your house safe from a wildfire visit the following sites:

Florida Division of Forestry – www.fl-dof.com
Tall Timbers Research Station - <http://www.talltimbers.org/fireecology.html>
Firewise – www.firewise.org

The Florida Division of Forestry is available to answer questions related to trees, woods, and land management throughout Florida, whether you're in the city, on a barrier island, or out in the country. Go to www.yourforestmanged.com to find the county forester in your area.

**April Birdathon
By Eleanor Marr**

The Birdathon, held this year on April 4, was great fun. Four active teams pursued Charlotte County birds from early morning till 4 PM, followed by a pizza party at Bayshore Linear Park. Although teams could choose their own itinerary, once again all four at sunrise were at Babcock Webb at the same Red-cockaded Woodpecker cluster. 119 species were seen in all, several of which don't appear on our Christmas Bird Count lists. Gray Kingbird and Orchard Oriole were the most exciting finds. Barn Swallow, Purple Martin, Eastern Kingbird, Least Tern, and Solitary Sandpiper are migrants that return to Florida in the spring. We don't usually see Cedar Waxwing and Least Bittern here until spring. Of course, some of our common winter residents, such as American Robin, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and most of the ducks were gone. The Birdathon was a financial success as well, with over \$1200 raised for youth environmental education. This year the funds will be divided between CHEC and our new scholarship for an upperclassman with a major in environmental studies.



SCANNING HELP NEEDED

Do you have some time this summer to help us scan PRAS history? We are trying to create electronic files of past news letters, meeting minutes etc. Please contact Cathy if you can help. All you need is a scanner and some free time.

**PRAS Spotlight
By Phyllis Cady**

Do you recognize this face? You may have seen him doing trail maintenance at Audubon's Pennington Park, as a trail guide at CHEC, or at one of our general meetings. Larry and his wife, Marty, have lived in Charlotte County for 10 years. Larry has an extensive background in both education and conservation. He was a biology and general science teacher for 13 years. He worked as an education consultant for the Missouri Dept. of Conservation, training teachers in conservation education, conducting college credit courses, and helping schools design outdoor classrooms. Larry now uses those education skills not only as a guide at CHEC, but also at two of the new Conservation Charlotte properties. Larry's favorite pastime is photography and he enjoys creating photo videos as well as fishing, kayaking, traveling, hiking and gardening. Join Larry on one of his hikes and you'll find out that he's a "punny" sort of guy.



If you know a PRAS member who would make a good candidate to be in the PRAS SPOTLIGHT, please send their name to ps_cady@yahoo.com.

**Walkabouts and Field Trips
2008-2009**

May 16: *Field Trip* Highlands Hammock
Mike Krzyzkowski/Jim Bonk

- *NORTH—the parking lot by McDonalds at Peachland Mall near I75 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**

May 21 : Members night: PRAS members present slides and stories

**Volunteer of the Month
Ken Ferris**

Many thanks to Ken Ferris who has been hard at work caring for Audubon Pennington Park over the years. Most recently Ken repaired our trail sign which was vandalized. Thank you for your years of care and upkeep of our urban park. You may help Ken and the other dedicated PRAS members on Wednesday mornings at 8 as they maintain the park trails.

**PRAS Photography Group
By Eleanor Marr**



The PRAS Photography group had their last workshop of the year on April 28 at CHEC. The photo shoot on April 14 was rained out. That was the day of the biggest storm of the season! Since this was the second photo shoot to be rained out this year (and a couple were rained out in previous years) one participant suggested Bill hire himself out as a rainmaker. Most members of the group made up for this by going on the Ft. DeSoto field trip where there was endless opportunity for great shots. Several members of the group will participate in the members slide show at the May 21 PRAS meeting. The group will meet again next January.

Rosemary S. Astel
Chris & Jan Cannell
William H. Champlin
Susan Gil
Elizabeth B. Haraden
Barbara Hendricks
Mr. John Hummon

Welcome



New Members

Clarence McLaughlin
Helen O'Neil
Jane Ruege
Carol Skillman
Ginny Stegman
Catherine Taylor

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

Non-profit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Punta Gorda, FL
Permit No. 100



May 2009
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Check the "Exp" date on your address label!
"1209" means your PRAS and/or National membership expires December 2009. 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

CURRENT RESIDENT OR



Printed on Recycled Paper
C & R Graphics (folding donated)

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: Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus Ludovicianus*) by Cathy Olson, PRAS Board President

The rose-breasted grosbeak is a beautiful bird that we see briefly during spring and fall migration as they go between northern North America and south through northwestern South America. It is a chunky bird with striking patterns. The adult male has a black head, back and tail with a white rump and belly. A large red triangular patch is on his breast and his wings have white patches which are quite distinctive in flight. The female is plainer and striped much like a sparrow. They use their large conical beak to eat fruit, seeds and insects. They build flimsy nests and the male helps the female incubate the eggs. They inhabit secondary growth forests and are commonly found in suburban areas.



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.

New Membership
 Renewal

Chapter Code: **C9ZE140Z**

Name: _____
Organization: _____
Address: _____
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Phone: () _____
E-mail: _____

- \$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
- \$20 Local and National Audubon (new members only, renewals \$35)
Includes all of the above plus National Audubon magazine.
- Additional Gift for PRAS
Please help PRAS continue our educational and conservation programs with a tax deductible contribution.

MAIL CHECK WITH THIS FORM TO:

PRAS, PO box 510760, Punta Gorda, FL 33951-0760

Total Enclosed \$ _____