



EVERGLADE KITE

NEWSLETTER OF THE
AUDUBON SOCIETY OF THE EVERGLADES
Serving Palm Beach County, Florida
Volume 48, Number 10
August 2008

CALENDAR

This year's field trip season has concluded; look for next year's calendar in our September issue!

Tuesday, August 4, 7:30 p.m., Howard Park, West Palm Beach. General Meeting; Members' Photo Night and Ice Cream Social.

As we go to press, the dates for our annual excursions to the flooded fields of Duda have not yet been determined. Water levels are quite high, and shorebird concentrations are lower than usual for this time of year. For more info on these trips, come to our August 4th general meeting, where we'll announce dates and times.

As usual, these trips are by special permission of the management of the farms; please **DO NOT CONTACT DUDA** about them. Conditions are very hot; bring lunch, water, sunscreen, etc.

www.auduboneverglades.org

We've completely redesigned our online community at www.auduboneverglades.org. Get up-to-the minute news about conservation issues in PB Co.; information about upcoming field trips, meetings, and events. Please send feedback to Ben at ben@kolstad.com or 561-367-7689.

Membership/Mailing Problems?

Address correspondence regarding Audubon magazine subscriptions and/or National Audubon Society Membership, to PO Box 52504, Boulder, Co. 80322. Or call 800-274-4201; or email CHADD@audubon.org

President's Perspective

Linda Humphries

Greetings from Michigan! I am visiting my family for the month of July. I am sure you are aware that Michigan is the home of the Kirtland's Warbler. I have not had a chance to see it this year, but my Dad's yard is full of birds. I love waking up to the sounds of their beautiful songs. I miss their singing when I am home in Florida. I would like to thank Cynthia Plockelman for filling in for me while I am away.

We have been very fortunate to appoint several new board members. Janet Schreiber was appointed our new treasurer. She will be learning our system from Paton White over the next couple of months. Janet has been in the banking business for many years. Marta Rue Isaacson has been appointed our new Public Relations chair. She is very enthusiastic and has lots of good ideas. Clive Pinnock, Manager of Okechee Nature Center, is Board Member at large. His bird expertise and new ideas are a welcome addition. He will be leading two bird walks for children 7 and over in our newly created children's program. Judy Hill has taken over as Hospitality chair, and is doing a great job. I would like to thank Sheila Reiss (Hospitality) for all of the hard work she did in the past and all the delicious treats she provided. I would also like to thank the board for their past support and I am looking forward to our continued team effort in creating an exciting Audubon future.

We have lots of exciting things ahead. The August general meeting is going to be an ice cream social and photo sharing night. It will start off with an update of the two injured Eagles at Folke Peterson. Bring your pictures and join in the fun!

Our general meetings will be moving to Pine Jog Environmental Center's new building on October 7, 2008. Pine Jog is located at 6301 Summit Blvd, West Palm Beach. There will be more information in the September *Kite*. Our September meeting will remain at Howard Park.

Please continue thinking of new ideas for our Chapter. I value your opinions, ideas, and support.

Tomorrow....

*As you find your way
Remember your binoculars
And all the birds today*

The Everglade Kite

is the newsletter of the Audubon Society of the Everglades, published 11 times a year.

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Audubon Society of the Everglades, incorporated in 1966, serves communities in Palm Beach County. Our purpose is to promote the conservation of wildlife and the natural environment and to advance human understanding of our place in the total ecological system.

THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS!

The following members accompanied Doris Mager on school visits:

Judy Hill

John Johnson

Evelyn MacQueen

Alan Parmalee

Jeri VanTaube

Marion Wells

These members assisted with accommodations:

Pat Althouse

Nelson and Mae Schad

ASE Scholarship Winner

Did you know *Erwinia* is a rod-shaped bacteria with peritrichous flagella and enzymatic activity?

Karen Dubbin does. Karen was awarded the Ruth and Seymour Miller Audubon Society of the Everglades \$2500 scholarship at the Palm Beach and Martin County Pathfinder Scholarship Awards in May. Karen was able to study these bacteria at Florida State University's Young Scholar's Program where she was chosen best Biochem student. These bacteria could be causing the dark lesions and tissue damage found on south Florida spiny lobsters. She performed lengthy biochemical procedures on the bacteria. These bacteria, which cause soft rot in vegetables, have possibly mutated and might be a cause of the lesions and damage on lobster. She presented the findings at a University of Florida Science Symposium.

Karen also studied Research Techniques in Biotechnology at a Brown University summer program. Co-Salutatorian, Captain of the Speech and Debate Team at Spanish River High School, active in the Drama Club, and National Honor and French Honor Societies, Karen has been an outstanding student.

Headed to MIT, Karen hopes to become a research scientist. ASE wishes her the best!

Birds of Prey Program

Doris Mager held students and teachers spellbound when she presented the Birds of Prey program. Over 1000 students had an opportunity to learn more about these important birds. E. T., Extra Terrific the Great Horned Owl, and Cara, the Crested Caracara, are always the crowd favorite as they fly from the back of the auditorium to the front. ASE has underwritten Doris' program for many years. Letters received from students attest to the impact of seeing live animals has on children. One student wrote "One day I might want to work for Audubon Society because it sure would be interesting." Another wrote "I learned these birds are not just killing machines, but majestic animals and friends to our ecosystem. I never thought birds could help our ecosystem. All birds do.....so if they can help, you can too." Schools participating this year were: Greenacres, Palmetto, and Timber Trace Elementary; Polo Park and Watson B. Duncan Middle School; and G-Star School of the Arts and Jupiter High School.



At right, Cara the caracara wows the kids on one of Doris's recent visits. let's all hope that, thanks to educational activities like this one, the sign in the background ("History") never has to apply to this beautiful species.

Governor Crist's Proposed Buy-Out of U.S. Sugar

Now that the news has had a chance to settle in, and we've had editorials from all the area's newspapers (*Palm Beach Post*, *Sun-Sentinel*), the Saint Petersburg *Times*, the New York *Times*, and more, here are some thoughts about Governor Crist's proposal for a buyout of U.S. Sugar's land around Lake Okeechobee.

In the first place, buy-out had better not mean bail-out. Are we sure that we're getting fair value for our money? (We should be able to offset some of the costs by considering the benefits of not having to do the really bleeding-edge restoration work like ASR wells and other science fiction engineering projects.)

What is the state going to do with a sugar mill?

Will the Fanjuls agree to the necessary land swaps to make this really work?

In a larger sense, this land purchase only makes sense if it kick-starts the long-promised and never-received federal participation in Everglades restoration. With a price tag near \$2 billion, I can't imagine a budget for anything else that the

SFWMD would want to do. The Army Corps and other federal agencies will have to step up if we are to continue with the comprehensive Everglades restoration plan (CERP). And CERP itself will have to implement one of its "softer" strategies—adaptive management—to accommodate this previously unimagined opportunity.

With a six-year timeline and many hurdles to overcome (clean-up, engineering, financing, land swaps, "imagineering") we can be cautiously optimistic about the future, but we will have to understand the details before we can celebrate. If this is nothing more than a bailout for Mr. Coker and company, with environmental benefits to be killed by litigation and infighting, where will we look next?

The SFWMD has a lot of work to do between now and November. The town of Clewiston has to figure out how to transform itself from a farming town to an ecotourism town, as Byron Stout of the Fort Myers *News-Press* wrote in a recent editorial in that paper.

Audubon of Florida Approves of Army Corps' Lake Okeechobee Water Schedule

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), after more than two years of efforts, and thousands of public comments, has recently adopted a new water level management plan for Lake Okeechobee. The new schedule was urgently needed because recent studies have concluded that the 70-year old Herbert Hoover Dike is no longer safe at deep lake levels. Hurricanes in recent years caused Lake Okeechobee to become perilously deep. In the wake of the New Orleans tragedy, the Corps has adopted this schedule to keep lake levels lower until re-enforcements of the dike are complete.

Lake Okeechobee is designated critical habitat for Snail Kites by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, but uncontrolled, widely fluctuating water levels in the Lake have prevented successful breeding in every year but one, since 1995.

Unfortunately, the new schedule cannot significantly increase environmental benefits in the watershed. Until Lake Okeechobee's severely over-drained watershed is retrofitted with about a million acre-feet of additional water storage capacity (equal to about two feet of lake depth), managers will not be able to give the lake more naturally fluctuating water levels, or protect the estuaries from harmful releases. Drainage in the watershed makes the lake fill too rapidly and deeply during wet periods and makes it dry down too rapidly during dry periods. Additional storage capacity can reverse these patterns by preventing the rapid rises during wet periods, and providing stored water to prevent excessive drops during dry periods.

The Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie Estuaries

The new schedule keeps the lake levels lower than optimal, which is slightly better than the former schedule which usually kept the lake too deep. The Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries will be impacted by the schedule change as well. The St. Lucie will get roughly the same volumes

of releases as before, but the new schedule is designed to deliver more frequent and smaller releases to help reduce the number of massive, estuary-killing releases. The Caloosahatchee estuary is projected to receive more periods of optimal release volumes, but about the same number of extremely large releases. The Caloosahatchee will fare better during dry periods because the Corps has elected to tailor releases to maintain acceptable salinity zones.

Water Release Decisions to Consider Environmental Conditions

AoF supports the new schedule because it provides appropriate safety for south Florida and is more proactive in water release decisions in that it allows the agencies more flexibility. In the recent past, release decisions were made solely by following an instruction manual, regardless of environmental conditions. The new schedule allows the agencies more flexibility to incorporate environmental conditions to guide water release decisions. Such a management framework has been tested in the past few years and has worked very well. For example, when oysters were spawning and their larvae were vulnerable to freshwater flows, the agencies postponed lake releases until the larvae were older and stronger.

We are encouraged that managers are making unprecedented efforts to manage water in the system, whenever possible, for environmental benefits. The "million acre-feet" of storage needed to better manage Lake water levels is a staggering amount and efforts such as the Governor's bold announcement to acquire 300 square miles of US Sugar's land, are the types of efforts needed to restore reasonable control of Okeechobee and estuary water management. Audubon will continue to work diligently on advocating for increased water storage and treatment in the Lake Okeechobee watershed.

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The Audubon Society of the Everglades General Meetings are held the first Tuesday of every month at 7:30 p.m. at Howard Park Community Center in West Palm Beach. The phone number for the Community Center is (561) 835-7055. The public is welcome to attend.