



EVERGLADE KITE

THE AUDUBON SOCIETY
OF THE EVERGLADES
(serving Palm Beach County, Florida)

~ ~ ~ ***Special Edition! December 2003*** ~ ~ ~

Audubon Assembly report

by Linda Most

The Audubon of Florida Annual Assembly was a very positive experience for Cynthia Plockelman and I. We had the opportunity to meet and visit with Auduboners from around the state, as well as with our AOF staff and board members. We heard reports on various successful chapter activities, and Cynthia participated in the process that sets Audubon's conservation priorities for 2004. We attended several different workshops and we will be sharing the results of what we learned with our chapter board. We also had the opportunity to meet with representatives of the National Audubon Society, who shared the news from National with the local chapters. National Audubon Society is committed to ecosystem restoration around the country, and the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan was mentioned as one of many ecosystem-level projects Audubon is supporting through research and advocacy.

One of the workshops I attended addressed Citizen Science. Individuals, families, and chapters can all contribute useful observations to the ornithological community through Project Eaglewatch and Project Colonywatch. Project Eaglewatch asks participants to commit to observing an eagle's nest on a regular schedule and reporting the observations to the Eaglewatch coordinator. The data collected is used to monitor the status of Bald Eagles in Florida. The only commitment needed is time. This project can be done individually or by a family, making it an easy way to get involved in protecting one of Florida's most majestic creatures.

Project Colonywatch requires a larger group of people and more time to be successful but can be a satisfying and fun way to participate in Citizen Science. Interested chapters are assigned a colony of shorebirds to monitor, and the amount of work involved can range from very light to all consuming depending on the amount of time participants can contribute and the size and location of the colony. Project Eaglewatch is underway throughout the state and there are nests in Palm Beach County that need monitoring. Project Colonywatch has been most successful on the west coast, in the Tampa Bay, Clearwater, and Sarasota areas.

Another initiative stressed in the workshops was partnering with other conservation and nature organizations at the local level. The St. Petersburg chapter has developed

a successful partnership with their local chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society. Together they have developed a set of urban conservation initiatives partnered with in-town birding activities for the interested neighborhoods.

Audubon Assemblies are not all work. The opening reception was held at the Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland, just north of Orlando. What a wonderful opportunity to see Audubon of Florida's programs at work and to meet some of the injured birds of prey whose lives were saved by the staff at the Center. These birds now live in comfort and will serve out their lives as ambassadors for their species both at the Center and in education programs held around the state.

At the Assembly meals are an opportunity to network and celebrate. Awards are given to chapters, individuals and organizations for their good works throughout Florida. Key-note speakers included Pulitzer Prize nominee Julie Hauserman, who has been writing about Florida's environment for fifteen years. Also featured were Drs. Bill Weber and Amy Vedder, internationally recognized for their work with mountain gorillas and tropical rainforests. Co-authors of "In the Kingdom of the Gorillas: Fragile Species in a Dangerous Land" they conducted groundbreaking scientific research with gorillas in Rwanda prior to its civil war in the '90s when the gorilla population was teetering toward extinction.

A special treat for birders was an afternoon with four of Florida's finest birders: Jeff Bouton on hawks, Peter Merritt with more video footage of warblers, Lee Syder on shorebirds, and Audubon's own Rich Paul on advanced birding techniques. Jeff, Peter, and Lee offered tips on identifying the birds they know best, and Rich shared suggestions for improving our general birding skills. It was a great afternoon dedicated to birders and birding.

The Audubon Assembly is not just for board members and chapter leaders. It is an opportunity for any interested Audubon member or family to get more involved with Audubon's work in Florida. There is something for everyone at each assembly and attending can be very rewarding for those who care about conservation in Florida. Please watch Audubon of Florida's website and think about attending the assembly yourself next fall.