



EVERGLADE KITE

NEWSLETTER OF THE
AUDUBON SOCIETY OF THE EVERGLADES
Serving Palm Beach County, Florida
Volume 46, Number 9
June 2006

CALENDAR

Tues. June 6, 7:30 p.m.

General meeting, Howard Park Community Center.

Wed. June 7, 8:30 a.m.

FL Conservation Commission, Northlake Blvd, W. Palm Beach.

Sat. June 24, 10 a.m.–3 p.m.

ASE table at Mounts Botanical Garden Annual Get-Together, 599 N. Military Trail, West Palm Beach.

Tues. July 4

INDEPENDENCE DAY HOLIDAY
General July meeting cancelled.
Happy Fourth; see you in August!

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Public Relations:

Writing publicity releases and notifying print and electronic media of upcoming events.

Exhibits:

Staffing ASE table, distributing literature at Mounts Botanical Garden, June 24.

Interested in one of these (or other) volunteer opportunities? Please contact Cynthia Plockelman at 561.585.1258.

Tuesday June 6th Program

Florida Butterflies

Alan Parmalee

Our speaker for the June 6th meeting is Alana Edwards, co-founder and current president of the Atala Chapter of the North American Butterfly Association. An alumna of Florida Atlantic University, Ms. Edwards did her master's thesis on the effect of prescribed fire on butterflies in pine flatwoods. Today she is working as the Education and Training Coordinator for FAU's Center for Environmental Studies and teaching subjects concerning the Kissimmee River Restoration and the Everglades Restoration Projects.

Ms. Edwards' program, Butterflies in their Ecosystems, will delight children and adults alike. Please join us at 7:30 PM at the Howard Park Community Center to learn about the butterfly life cycle, interesting butterfly behaviors, and where to find these magnificent creatures in the wild.

President's Comments

Marcella Munson

As we head into the quieter summer months, I would like to thank our ASE volunteers who do so much to promote environmental education right here in Palm Beach County. In April, ASE volunteers staffed an exhibit booth at the 2006 NatureScaping event held at MacArthur State Park. This all-day event attracted those interested in the environment, native planting, birds and animals. Activities included arts and crafts, silent auctions, and lectures on butterflies, native plants, and sea turtles. In May, ASE partnered with Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge and the Palm Beach Zoo to celebrate International Migratory Bird Day. As with NatureScaping, this event brought out many young families interested in learning more about the environment and conservation. Such community activities are at the heart of ASE's organizational mission, and remind us that environmental change is possible if we all participate. Wherever your summer travels may take you, whether it's across the county or across the globe, I hope that you will come back in August relaxed, refreshed, and ready to share your adventures, discoveries, knowledge, and expertise with ASE.

Naturalist's Calendar for June

The long, hot summer season begins in June when the rains set in and South Florida again feels like a steamy subtropical region. When the wintering birds have long since departed and the snowbirds have gone, only our Florida natives remain. Two of the most famous are the sea turtle and the alligator. Starting in late May, several species of sea turtles begin nesting on our shores. From Hobe Sound to Boca Raton, hundreds of Green, Loggerhead, Leatherback, and even a few Kemp's ridleys, will haul themselves onto county

beaches as they follow instincts millions of years old. Year after year, they will traverse hundreds, even thousands, of miles of ocean waters to climb onto their natal shore and lay their eggs. Gumbo Limbo Nature Center in Boca Raton (561.338.1473), and the Loggerhead Marinelife Center in Juno Beach (561.627.820), offer nighttime turtle walks this month to give residents and visitors the chance to learn more about these amazing prehistoric creatures, and (hopefully) witness an actual nesting. June is also when female alligators begin

building their nests. After the bellowing and head slapping of the mating season (spring through early summer), the rains begin and the gators can disperse in the higher water, helping calm human fears about concentrations of angry reptiles in our shiny new subdivisions. Gator eggs cannot survive immersion in water, so the nests are often built up to 5 meters from the water's edge. If you're adventurous enough to visit the Everglades (Shark Valley or right here at Loxahatchee NWR) in the wet season, you might spot one!

The Everglade Kite

is the newsletter of the Audubon Society of the Everglades, published 12 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.

Conservation Report

Rosa Durando

Please put June 7 and 8 on your calendar. A very rare event: the Florida Conservation Commission, formerly known as the Game Commission (and that moniker remains a more accurate name) will be holding its quarterly board meeting at the West Palm Beach Marriott on Okeechobee. The meeting starts at 8:30 a.m [Ed.: *the full agenda can be found online at <http://myfwc.com/commission/2006/June/index.html>]. Can't remember the last time they held a meeting in West Palm Beach! Rules and listing of species like manatee, gopher tortoise, and eagles will be discussed along with habitat protection plans. Our chapter is morally obligated to turn out. We should also ask what has been done for Scrub Jay and Snail Kite lately. What is the status of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker, especially since all the burning?*

This one month has seen major assaults on land use planning in our county. Notably the planning of a large new FPL plant near Twenty Mile Bend in the EAA. It will require enormous quantities of cooling water. Source? Between the C-51 and L-8 canals. This will put NO₂ and SO₂ emissions just upwind of the Refuge. Acid rain possible. Also in the EAA, a proposal to mine 4000 acres of land for the next 40 years to a depth of 50 feet. These impacts will surely piecemeal the EAA. You should be aware our stalwart county commissioners declined to plan or create policy for the future of said EAA. Dade county, move over! Between their infamous Lake Belt region and congestion we skipped "Browardization" and are moving right into "Dade-ization."

One item coming up on Friday, May 19, at the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council (of which Palm Beach County is supposed to be a member) is a study titled Sustainable Treasure Coast. The study has ominously omitted Palm Beach County.

Other items coming up that day will be three invasions of sprawl into rural agriculture (1 unit per 10 acres), in our county: 1 unit/acre residential. Inadequate road system, no public transportation, bad drainage, no schools. From the regional planning council, recommendations go to the Department of Community Affairs. Protests to the DCA might help convince them that this is stupid planning. Call me (561-965-2420) for more details.

You all need a few bright spots: vulture shooting is still on hold. The Wellington proposal to keep their dirty pumps pumping into the Refuge, which was passed by SFWMD over my protests in April: after threats in May, I was told it will be brought back for reconsideration on the second Wednesday of June board meeting. Help? Please call.

On May 2, we gave a Pathfinder's Award to a deserving young man named Stephen McLaughlin of John I. Leonard for his diligent work on surveying endangered air plants in Grassy Waters preserve. He wrote an excellent thesis that was accompanied by superb grades, community and school outreach, and wonderful recommendations.

I shall end on this cheerful note, and not get into extension of SR7, loss of thousands of acres of grove land to massive development, need for more road building and schools. The latest on that one: the front 15 acres of Pine Jog!

Bird of the Month: Black-necked Stilt

Ben Kolstad

University of Miami alumnus Dennis Paulson's tongue-in-cheek name for the long-legged elegant members of the stilt family is the "slenderellas." The genus *Himantopus* (Greek for "strap-foot," according to Choate's *Dictionary of American Bird Names*, or "spindle legged" according to Holloway's *Dictionary of Birds of the United States*) has several members worldwide—*Himantopus himantopus* in Asia, the Black-winged Stilt, looks very much like its New World counterpart, *Himantopus mexicanus*. Our Black-necked Stilt differs most noticeably from its Asian cousin in one respect: in addition to the wings and mask, *H. mexicanus*'s neck is also black.

The stilt has the longest legs in proportion to body size of all the shorebirds; its black and white plumage and pink legs make it quite the dandy, giving rise to its nickname, the "tuxedo bird." Approach too close, however, and one discovers that this bird does not enjoy sharing its space with other party-goers. A high-pitched *kek-kek-kek* erupts, and this skinny little bird will rise up into the air, incredibly long legs dangling down and extending well past the tail, to start harassing pedestrians, other shorebirds, passing raptors, encroaching Great Blue Herons—this slender little bird takes on all comers, although its vocal defense is no real threat to a determined predator.

The Black-necked Stilt can be found in marshy areas and shallow ponds across the Gulf and Atlantic coasts, on Utah's Great Salt Lake and California's Salton Sea. According to National Geographic's *Complete Birds*, its range is spreading north in interior Western states. and is a short to medium distance migrant, leaving the interior for coastal regions in winter. There is a small but (from informal observations) increasing breeding population here in Palm Beach County.

During May and probably well into June, you'll be able to see these most elegant of wading birds tending chicks at Green Cay Nature Center in Boynton Beach. They have also been spotted at Wakodahatchee Wetlands.

Audubon of Florida Report

Audubon Success: Reinforce Hoover Dike and Restore Lake Okeechobee

Audubon of Florida successfully convinced the Governing Board of the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) not to recommend that Herbert Hoover Dike be turned into a dam and instead focus on real solutions for protecting people and the environment.

During its meeting May 10, the SFWMD Board received a recommendation to send a resolution to Congress calling for changing the status of the Dike to a dam, a policy that Audubon insists could put the public in greater danger because it could lead to higher water levels, ultimately destroy the Lake's ecological functioning, and increase ecological damage to estuaries.

Solutions exist that would both protect residents and the environment:

- Reinforce Hoover Dike,
- Manage the Lake at lower, more ecologically healthy levels,
- Increase water storage upstream to help prevent the Lake from getting too deep in the first place,
- Develop additional water storage projects throughout the Okeechobee watershed and in the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA), and
- Build flowage projects to move more water south.

After hearing public comments, the Governing Board decided not to approve the recommendation. Instead, it directed staff to lobby the US Congress for more funding to reinforce the Dike and to assist the US Army Corps of Engineers to develop a hurricane evacuation plan for the communities around the Lake. This was a big victory for the health of Lake Okeechobee and local communities.

Volunteers Needed for Bird Survey at DuPuis Management Area

Ben Kolstad

The DuPuis Management Area, run by SFWMD, has extensive habitat right next door to Corbett WMA in northern Palm Beach County. I'm sure some of you out there are more familiar with the area than I am. We are currently seeking volunteers to survey the birds of DuPuis. If you are interested in joining the study group, please let me know at 561.367.7689, or benkolstad@adelphia.net.

Audubon Urges Government to Make Everglades Decisions in the Sunshine

As Everglades restoration projects move forward, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is excluding the public from attending important project planning meetings. This is unacceptable! Floridians have long been accustomed to the idea of "government in the sunshine." We believe that if citizens and stakeholder representatives are in the room, better decisions are made.

In these meetings, Audubon contributes crucial science and policy expertise that helps inform environmental protection and restoration. Our science and policy staff has historically participated in many of these agency meetings where important decisions are made. Experience tells us that our presence helps ensure that ecological goals are not compromised.

This decreased transparency is disturbing and has real consequences. Audubon Scientist Paul Gray, Ph.D has been prohibited from attending Lake Okeechobee Watershed project planning meetings. Sr. Policy Associate Jamie Furgang was excluded last month from an important planning meeting on the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands restoration project.

Everglades advocates and other stakeholders should be given timely access to important project information. We should never be banned from government meetings that use public monies to plan and implement projects that impact the public good. Currently, the only information made available to the public is in the form of the most general progress updates, with few technical details.

"The bottom line is I've worked here for a long time and can offer a lot of on-the-ground information to the team," Dr. Gray said. "These teams are made up of talented people, but most of them are not from around here, and few of the members are ecologists. Having ecologists at the table is important to complement other technical expertise, such as engineering and hydrology." Gray concluded, "The public can help them if we are allowed to attend the meetings."

Audubon is formulating an appeal to Corps decision makers to reverse this policy in favor of Everglades decisions made in the sunshine.

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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.

GET PUBLISHED! The deadline for submissions for the **July 2006** issue is **June 10th**

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