



# EVERGLADE KITE

NEWSLETTER OF THE  
AUDUBON SOCIETY OF THE EVERGLADES  
Serving Palm Beach County, Florida  
Volume 46, Number 10  
July 2006

## CALENDAR

### Tues. July 4

INDEPENDENCE DAY—Regular meeting cancelled. See you in August at the Ice Cream Social and Members' Photo Night!

### TBA in July or August

Fisheating Creek area—Field trip to see Swallow-tailed Kites. Call Claudine Laabs for info and to get your name on the list.

### Tuesday August 1

Members' Photo Night and Ice Cream Social! See next month's *Kite* for details.

### Saturday August 12 and 19

Field trip to Duda farms. See inside for details.

## SAVE THE DATE!

### Audubon Assembly 2006

October 19-21

*Location:* Holiday Inn Cocoa Beach Oceanfront Resort

*Special rate:* \$89.99/night.

Reserve rooms now at 800-206-2724. (Special Audubon rate good through September 27 only.)

Don't miss it! Plan to attend Florida's largest gathering of conservation-minded citizens. Join chapter leaders and members, Audubon staff, wildlife professionals, environmental advocates, scientists, students, agency and elected officials, and other Floridians to network and learn about the environment.

Details, including Assembly registration information, programs, exhibits and field trips will appear in the summer *Naturalist*, and available online at [www.audubonofflorida.org](http://www.audubonofflorida.org) in July.

## President's Comments

*Marcella Munson*

What's the relationship between the stock market and the Everglades, and what difference does it make if water levels in the Everglades (and in Water Containment Areas, such as the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, our local arm of the Everglades) rise or fall on a given day? The answer might just have something to do with how many wading birds we will see next year here in Palm Beach County.

South Florida is famous for its wide array of spectacular wading birds, including Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, Great Blue Herons, Roseate Spoonbills, and Wood Storks. Generations of scientists, naturalists, and bird watchers have been fascinated by these waders who often feed in large competitive groups. If you've ever watched a group of these waders, you know that a wide array of specialized foraging behaviors is at work. While the Great Blue Heron often spears its prey at the end of its sharp bill, the Wood Stork uses its bright pink (breeding-season) feet to feed by touch alone, slamming its bill shut in less than 0.03 seconds when it encounters tasty aquatic invertebrates or fish. The Great Blue Heron's strategy rewards keen eyesight, giving the bird a decent chance of catching what few fish are available when prey density is low. In contrast, the stork's method only works well when food sources are heavily concentrated in shallow waters. The stakes are high indeed: if Wood Storks do not have adequate access to high-density feeding grounds, they will often fail to nest, or even abandon active nests. This sensitivity to changing water levels has earned this wader a starring role in Everglades restoration: the Wood Stork is one of the most critical "indicator species" used to assess the overall health of the critical environmental region known as the Everglades.

Consistently high water levels, or water levels that draw up or down suddenly, can spell disaster for breeding waders like the Wood Stork. And as the population of South Florida continues to grow, populations of wading birds like the Wood Stork become ever more dependent on human actions. In 1931, 90% of wading birds nested in the mangrove-marsh rookeries at the south end of Shark River Slough. By 1989, 85% of breeding populations had moved to various Water Conservation Areas (many of which are literally in our county's back yard). Besides being home to native plants and animals, these WCAs are used for stormwater storage, which means that water levels often shift abruptly, or remain extremely elevated for long periods.

The Wood Stork is a crucial indicator species, but it is by no means the only one. Recently, a group of scientists working with the South Florida Ecosystem Restoration task Force have come up with a list of 14 indicators to be considered in implementing CERP (Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program). Taken together, these ecosystem elements can help us determine the health of the Everglades, and whether or not Everglades restoration projects are achieving their goals. These 14 key indicators include various segments of the Everglades food chain: from periphyton and water plants, to pink shrimp, oysters, and fish, to wading birds (including White Ibis, Wood Storks, and Roseate Spoonbills). They also include such baseline environmental measurements as water volume and groundwater salinity. Looking at all these elements together will give scientists and policy makers a much more comprehensive picture of the health of the Everglades. Just as financial advisors encourage us not simply to look at one stock's performance to judge the health of financial markets, we should all encourage our policy makers not to look at just one species when assessing the Everglades' ecological health.

## **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*

As usual, there has been no scarcity of public meetings that decide "public policy," or more accurately, determine how the various bureaucratic agencies intend to handle environmental issues that should be of importance to all of us.

The rare local quarterly meeting of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission that took place in West Palm Beach confirmed the probability that the governor-appointed board would vote to downlist the eagle and the manatee. Your chapter, as well as many state and national organizations, did not support the decisions. Sorry to report, Audubon of Florida was not a presence. After the fact, they declared they didn't quite agree with the stand so many organizations took. The gopher tortoise may see improved protection, but no commitment to end the cruel practice of killing those in the path of a bulldozer by granting an "incidental take" permit.

June 14 saw the monthly SFWMD board meeting inconveniently held in Fort Lauderdale. They were supposed to retract a previously granted permit to Wellington to continue to pump their pollution directly into the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. They publicly stated that we will not allow that practice past December 31, 2006. We also gave some strong comments on the dike around Lake Okechobee, where and how to support the overused, ill-conceived plan of how, to where, and when to start this so-called evacuation. Not much discussion on how to properly manage (lower levels and clean up) that once very productive (fish and birds) lake.

June 16 was the monthly board meeting of the Regional Planning Council which Palm Beach County is supposed to be part of. Again, know that all these boards are appointed by the governor! Palm Beach County was NOT included in a state-sponsored **regional** study. I publicly got a bit upset about that! It effectively denies the existence of the largest, most critically positioned county in the state!

Again, a study on evacuation of the people living around the lake, not to mention the nonconsideration of the prisons and governmental buildings. Again, not addressing the real problem: do not let the lake get over 14 feet.

Perhaps the most amazing proposal with this unsolved problem existing is proposing more housing, an extension of the Port of Palm Beach, and a lock on a canal at Belle Glade to facilitate constructing boating amenities and attract housing.

Keep in mind, the water still is basically not fit to drink, and if you are pregnant, don't take a steaming hot shower!

Lastly, a plea to come to some of these meetings. Call (561-965-2420) if you wish more details.

### **Thank You Meeting Volunteers!**

Hospitality for the June meeting was provided by Sheila Reiss and Judy Hill; Ann DeBooth provided the friendly greetings at the door. Thank you all very much!

### **Thank You Exhibit Volunteers!**

These volunteers assisted at Naturescaping, International Migratory Bird Day or FAU Earth Day.

Judy Hill  
Jill Harrold  
Marian Wells  
Marcella Munson  
Ben Kolstad  
Stella Rossi  
Kathy Stambaugh

Creighton Lederer  
Barbara Howley  
Susan Snyder  
Louise Bing  
Arlene Kurtis  
Carol Shields

## Bird of the Month: Least Tern

Ben Kolstad

*Sterna antillarum*. L 9" W 20"  
White forehead, thin and long



Least Tern by Steven D'Amato

orange-yellow bill in breeding season (and not seen in winter in Palm Beach county or in the state, for that matter).

Dunne (2006) calls it short-bodied, short-tailed, and long-winged: "all angles and energy." The flight is "buoyant and swift" according to Stevenson and Anderson (1994).

This beach-nesting species is running out of room here in South Florida. A few enterprising colonies have set up shop on local gravel rooftops, but not all of their friends have gotten

the memo. This species is in decline throughout its range, and is listed as a threatened species by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission.

Dunne calls the Least Tern the "easily piqued beach pixie" because of its aggressive intolerance of intruders.

If you spend an afternoon at Wakodahatchee wetlands, you can see the typical feeding behavior of this smallest of terns: it hovers, then dives, but sometimes picks up food on or near the surface. It will then bring its prey to the roof of one of the rain shelters and deposit it in the waiting mouth of one of its hungry young.

Dunne, P. *Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion*. NY: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Stevenson, H., Anderson, B. *Birdlife of Florida*. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1994.

## Duda Farms Field Trips

August brings our annual visits to the flooded fields of Duda Farms in Belle Glade to look for the shorebirds and wading birds that concentrate on these fields.

The dates will be Saturday August 12, and Saturday August 19.

The fewer number of cars involved in these trips, the more enjoyable they are for everyone, so please plan to carpool and to limit your participation to one trip only!



Dowitcher by Kirsten Munson

Meet at the Kmart store at the northwest corner of the intersection of Southern Blvd. (State Road 80) and 441/State Road 7. Park next to the garden center. Carpooling is required and we leave Kmart at 7:00 a.m. Return to the coast will be around noon.

Come with a full tank of gas; bring binoculars and spotting scopes, fluids, snacks, sunscreen, and hats. There will be very little walking but expect intense heat and glare. We may see myriad migrating shorebirds and spectacular gatherings of our local wading birds. Please note that we are responsible for everyone arriving and departing as a group. The farms are private, not open to the public. We have special permission from the Duda Farms management to bird on their property for these two annual field trips only. For questions, call me at 561-585-7714. Please DO NOT Call Duda!

--Gloria Hunter

## MESSAGE BOARD

### Swallow-tailed Kite Alert

We may be able to have another field trip to see the Swallow-tailed Kites this year. It was spectacular last year. The trip will be early on a Saturday morning in July or August, whenever the ranger finds them gathering. Please call Claudine (561-655-9779) to put your name on the list.

### Seen About Town

A Red-tailed Hawk nest has been reported in Boynton Beach. Not a common nesting bird in eastern Palm Beach County, the adult has been spotted on a light pole on I-95 near Boynton Beach Blvd. (Don't bird while driving!)

If you have any sighting reports, please send them to me at newsletter@audubon.org or benkolstad@adelphia.net

### Volunteers Needed for Bird Survey at DuPuis

The DuPuis Management Area, run by SFWMD, has extensive habitat right next door to Corbett WMA in northern Palm Beach County. On the spring migration count we had 49 species, and I'm sure we were just scratching the surface. We are currently seeking volunteers to survey the birds of DuPuis. I know that many of you out there are more familiar with the area than I am. If you are interested in joining the study group, please let me know at 561.367.7689, or benkolstad@adelphia.net.

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In Florida, a special 3-way membership automatically makes you a member in the National Audubon Society, Audubon of Florida, and Audubon Society of the Everglades. Your membership will include subscriptions to AUDUBON magazine and the EVERGLADE KITE.

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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 **August 2006** issue is **July 10th**

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