



EVERGLADE KITE

NEWSLETTER

Monthly Newsletter for Audubon Everglades

VOL 60 | Issue 8 | April 2020



Black-bellied Whistling Duck © Wikipedia

Bird of the Month: Black-bellied Whistling Duck (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*)

by Clive & Celecia Pinnock

The 2020 Bird of the Month series will focus on species of waterfowl that permanently reside in or are seasonal visitors to our state. To assist our members in viewing these birds more readily, efforts will be made to indicate possible locations where they might be seen. As in the past, basic information on each species will be shared in the Kite Newsletter and at the Monthly Meetings.

The Black-bellied Whistling Duck is an uncommon to abundant permanent resident in our state; however, it is reported that it is rarely observed in the Panhandle and yet to be seen in the Keys. Although the species originated in Africa and South America, its range, which now includes the southern United States, seems to be extending northward. Its appearance is goose-like due to its long neck and legs. It has a gray face with white eye-rings, a red bill, and pink to reddish legs. The neck and breast are rusty in color, and the belly, rump and tail are black. The white wing patch shows as a broad white stripe when the bird is in flight.

It is not unusual to see Black-bellied Whistling Ducks in flocks varying in size from pairs and a few individuals to numbers in the hundreds. They frequent shallow freshwater marshes, ponds, lakes and flooded agricultural fields. They also spend a considerable amount of time feeding in upland areas (golf courses, irrigated land, fields, lawns, prairies and overgrown pastures), eating grass seeds and the seeds of other herbaceous plants. They also eat corn, rice and other favored agricultural grain left behind after harvesting and have been known to damage some unharvested crops. Their diet, although primarily made up of plant material (aquatic and terrestrial), includes, to a much lesser extent, aquatic invertebrates (snails, midges and other aquatic insect larvae), which they obtain by dabbling in shallow water.

Pair-bonding is established during the winter months, and it is believed that these ducks form life-long pair bonds. As the nesting season ensues, both adult birds actively seek out a nest site, establishing the nest and

incubating the eggs together. Nests are generally placed in tree cavities or in man-made nest boxes when available (4 to 20' above ground or water), but the birds will also build ground nests in grass thickets and short vegetation near water. Cavity nests are bare or with a few wood chips, but ground nests are shallow scrapes lined with grass and weeds.

Twelve to sixteen whitish eggs are laid by the female and the clutch is incubated for 25 to 30 days by both the male and female. The precocial chicks are able to leave the nest within a day or so after hatching and are cared for by both parents. The chicks are immediately able to feed themselves, gleaning small terrestrial and aquatic protein-rich insects from the pond's edge and from the water's surface. For the first few days, dabbling is challenging for the chicks, due to their small size and light weight, but they soon become proficient at this feeding method. Young are fully fledged at about 2 months.

continued on page 4

WHERE TO EXPAND YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE ENVIRONMENT DURING SOCIAL DISTANCING

by Scott Zucker



During this critical time, as we make major adjustments in our lives to meet the threat to human health and to the social and economic challenges caused by the coronavirus, we have the opportunity, since almost all activities have been canceled and most of us are practicing social distancing or isolation, to expand our knowledge of the other great existential crisis humanity faces - climate change.

It does not require much imagination to understand the impact to health, the economy, and our social fabric that the coronavirus is having and that climate change will continue to have. It was our tepid early response to the virus, when it first showed its ugly face in January and we failed to recognize and execute the necessary changes needed immediately, which has exacerbated our present predicament. Will climate change offer the same disastrous scenario?

Scientists are already seeing connections between the [Coronavirus and Climate Change](#). The areas that have been the hardest hit in China and Italy have shown a significant reduction in carbon emissions since the onset of the virus. World health experts suspect that people suffering from respiratory illnesses (8.8 million deaths a year are attributed to air pollution worldwide) in areas where there are higher levels of air pollution are more likely to succumb to this disease, which targets the respiratory system.

Although the accelerated changes to our climate may not seem to pose the same immediate threat as the coronavirus, the long-term consequences will likely

be far more devastating. So, while we spend our time in social isolation, let's make the most of our downtime by learning more about climate change so we can become better advocates for change. Here are some excellent websites to visit on the Internet in the comfort of your own home, where you can become a climate change expert and learn more about the environment in general. Simply click on the blue links. Take your time (you probably have plenty) perusing these informative sites. Enjoy and stay safe.

Audubon's "[Survival by Degrees](#)" gives you graphic scientific projections on the fate of the North American bird population by zip code so you can see the outlook for the birds that you know and love. Many articles for further reading about climate change relating to birds are available in the section "[Climate](#)".

The Sierra Club's section "[Climate and Energy](#)" offers articles and a weekly roundup of related news.

NASA's "[Global Climate Change](#)" section offers articles based on some of the most important scientific research in the world on climate change.

The New York Times "[Climate Forward](#)" publishes a weekly climate report that you can receive for free in your inbox.

[Inside Climate News](#) has both articles and videos covering climate.

[Climate Home](#) offers perhaps the broadest range of articles exploring climate change.

[Scientific American's Climate](#) is a subsection of their excellent "[Sustainability](#)" section.

Nature's "[Climate Science](#)" subsection offers articles and links to many additional open-access articles on climate in its excellent section, "[Earth and Environmental Sciences](#)".

[Sciline](#) offers the ability to search for articles on all science subjects. If you wish to find articles specifically on climate change, type in "climate change."

[Environmental News Network section Climate](#)" is a great source for environmental news and policy.

[Bloomberg News section "Green Climate Adaptation"](#) offers audio and/or video articles.

[Ecowatch's "Climate"](#) section often has multiple daily articles.

[Gizmodo's Earther](#) sub-section "[Climate Crisis](#)" offers almost daily articles and an occasional video on a wide range of climate subjects.

The [Common Dreams "Climate"](#) section and [Think Progress' "Climate"](#) section are two somewhat more political green takes of the climate crisis.

Finally, here are more great sites to learn more about the environment in general and also include articles on climate change: [*NPR's "Environment"](#), [*Smithsonian's "Our Planet"](#), [*Center for Biological Diversity's "The Revelator"](#), [SciTechDaily's "Earth"](#), [*Stanford University's "Science and Technology"](#) (some articles include videos), [*CNN's "Energy and Environment"](#), [*Phys.org's "Environmental news"](#), The Guardian's [Environment](#), [The Great Courses plus](#) You must become a paid member. [*Greenmatters](#)

Bringing Nature to Life in Black & White

by Alan Chin Lee



Photo: Egret Impact © Edwin Wilke

Why black and white and not color? This is a nature photography club after all, and nature is full of stunning colors! Photography is “the art or process of producing images by the action of radiant energy and especially light on a sensitive surface” (Merriam-Webster). One can argue that the difference between black and white and color images is subjective for both the photographer and the viewer.

Creating a compelling image in black and white can be considerably more challenging than creating its equivalent in color. Removal of color causes the photographer to look at elements such as intensity of light and its effect on the subject (contrast) in addition to textures and patterns. When color is removed, a photograph can become flat and uninteresting, effectively demonstrating that there is a difference between color contrast (think of black and white photography as color blind) and light contrast. However, when done well, something elemental or soul stirring can take place, revealing the essence of the subject.

In South Florida, there is no shortage of subject matter. During this time of the year, many species of birds are breeding, native flowers are blooming, and

the insect population is increasing. Florida’s unique landscape also holds many opportunities: vast areas of pine flatwoods, scrub, marl prairies, marsh lands, mangrove and cypress forests, to name just a few. This environment inspired the famous Clyde Butcher to set aside his color photography and to focus on

large format, black and white Florida landscape photography.

April Photography Competition

On April 27, 2020, the Audubon Everglades Photography Club will host its fourth photography competition for members. The Assigned Subject is Black and White, and all subject matter is welcome, with the exception of birds. Birds are always welcome in the accompanying Nature Open category. Following this competition, on May 18, 2020, the club will host its end-of-year competition. All ribbon winners from the year’s previous competitions will face off against each other within their respective categories for the coveted *Image of the Year* awards.

Guests may attend up to two (2) club meetings. However, Audubon Everglades Photography Club membership is a requirement for entry in club competitions and attendance at field trips. You can join online here.

To learn more about the upcoming competitions, future presentations, field trips scheduled for this year, and details regarding membership and meetings (time and place), please visit our informative club section on the Audubon Everglades website.



Photo: Great American Eclipse © Alan Chin Lee

WHY DOES THIS BIRD HAVE PAINT SPOTS ON IT?

by Doreen LePage



Photo: Paint-marked Ibis in research project © Cali Wilson

White Ibises usually prey on aquatic animals such as fish, snails and crayfish, but they're becoming accustomed to bread, fast food and popcorn from people, says Sonia Hernandez, a veterinarian and ecologist at the University of Georgia. This shift in behavior could have serious consequences, not just for the Ibises but also for people. It may allow pathogens transmitted through feces, like salmonella, to build up and pose risks for both birds and humans. The strains of salmonella bacteria that infect White Ibises are the same ones that make people sick, especially in Florida, where White Ibises fly from urban to natural environments fairly easily.

Cali A. Wilson is a PhD student in the Interdisciplinary Disease Ecology Across Scales (IDEAS) Program in the Odum School of Ecology at the University of Georgia. She is interested in behavioral and environmental determinants of parasite transmission in wildlife. Her current research, under the direction of Dr. Sonia Altizer and Dr. Richard Hall, focuses on the influence

of humans feeding wildlife on the behavior and health of urban animals. Cali is studying populations of White Ibis in South Florida to understand how feeding-induced behavioral changes in urban birds can alter the spread of infectious diseases.

Currently, she is investigating how the behavior of each individual Ibis changes from day to day and exploring how those behavioral changes can influence its health. To do this, Cali must be able to identify the same Ibis day after day. Researchers have traditionally used leg bands to identify birds. This is a great method for long-term studies but can be difficult, because you need to catch each bird to attach the leg band. Cali is hoping she has solved this problem by using animal-safe paint for identification, because she can apply paint to the birds without catching them. Cali pointed out, "You should never put paint on animals or disturb wildlife in any way. We have proper scientific permits and permission from university, local, state, and federal agencies to conduct this research, and I am trained

in bird capture." The paint does not bother the birds, and they happily continue their normal behaviors with these small markings. The paint will fade naturally over time as the birds preen themselves. This method will allow researchers to learn more about what White Ibises do with their time and permit the study of the health of individual Ibises over time.

Cali contacted Audubon Everglades to make us aware of her research in case local birders begin to report strange looking Ibises in the area. I reached out to Cali for a few photos of her paint-marked birds. She provided two photos and pointed out that she had paint-marked a few birds at Kagan Park in Juno Beach and will likely paint-mark birds at Indian Creek Park in Jupiter. She mentioned in her email, "I have reddish/pink paint, blue paint, and green (really looks turquoise) paint. I'm curious to know if anyone sees these birds in other locations."

It was not long before a birder spotted one of these paint-marked birds. Thomas Dickinson, AE Friends member, took a photo outside of his condo in Juno Beach and was curious about who had painted a bird. I provided him with Cali's contact information so he could report his finding.

Cali is happy to answer any questions about her research project. She can be reached [via her website](#). If you see one of her study subjects, please fill out the form on her website to help her keep track of her birds!



Photo: I do believe I see the bird from Cali's photo #2, © Thomas Dickinson

Duck continued from page 1

Note of Interest: Female Black-bellied Whistling ducks are notorious for "egg dumping," i.e., laying their eggs in the nests of other Whistling Ducks. Some of these atypical clutch sizes may contain 50 or more eggs.

Possible Viewing Locations: Wakodahatchee Wetlands, Peaceful Waters Wetlands (when reopened), Vierra Wetlands, Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Everglades National Park, the STAs, and Flying Cow Road Wetlands.

JOIN AUDUBON

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

There are two ways to join Audubon Everglades:

FRIENDS OF AUDUBON EVERGLADES MEMBERSHIP:

All your membership dues and contributions are put to use supporting local conservation projects and educational programs in Palm Beach County. You will receive 12 issues of the Kite newsletter, priority for some special trips and discounted rates at some events and vendors. Join using the PayPal link off our website or by mailing the attached membership application. The Audubon Everglades Kite newsletter is available by email only.

NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP:

includes membership in Florida Audubon and Audubon Everglades plus one year of the Audubon magazine. [Join online here.](#)

Your NAS membership does not grant you the special privileges and discounts available to members of Friends of Audubon Everglades. If you choose to join us through National Audubon Society, please also consider becoming a Friend of Audubon Everglades to support local conservation and education initiatives.

Yes, I want to become a member of FRIENDS OF AUDUBON EVERGLADES

Join now using PayPal. Go to AudubonEverglades.org/membership to complete the application.

Or, complete this form and mail your check to: Audubon Society of the Everglades, PO Box 16914, West Palm Beach, Florida 33416-6914 ([make checks payable to Audubon Society of the Everglades](#))

Please check one: ☐ \$25 (Single) ☐ \$20 (Student) ☐ \$20 (Senior) ☐ \$35 (Household*) ☐ \$75 (Patron*)

Please feel free to give above the membership amount with a contribution of \$ _____

☐ New Member ☐ Renewal

Name _____

Email _____

Phone _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ ZIP _____

*If you selected Household or Patron Membership, please provide the names of all members living at the same address.
(2 adults and children under age 18)

Household/Patron Additional Names _____