

EVERGIADE KITE NEWSLETER Northly Newsletter for Audubon Everglades VOL 61 | Issue 7 | March 2021



Left: Swainson's Warbler © Andy Reago & Chrissy McClarren/Flickr

Bird of the Month: Swainson's Warbler (Limnothlypis swainsonii)

The 2021 Bird of the Month Series focuses on twelve North American species requested by our Audubon Everglades members. Each month, information on the featured species will cover its description, range, habitat, food, and reproduction. This information will also be covered in the Bird of the Month Power Point presentation at each monthly meeting.

The Swainson's Warbler is a shy and secretive warbler which spends most of its time on or near the ground. It is more often heard than seen while it searches the dense undergrowth of southern swamps, moist forested ravines covered by well-developed canopies, and dense understories with extensive leaf litter. These habitats, located in the southeastern United States, offer the species foraging opportunities for a vast array of ground-dwelling invertebrate prey.

Its diet is comprised of insects (ants, bees, wasps, crickets, grasshoppers, katydids, flies, beetles, and caterpillars), spiders, and centipedes. Atypical of warblers, the Swainson's Warbler uses its relatively long, sturdy bill to flip leaves while searching for these edible morsels.

Unlike most other warblers, the Swainson's is more cryptic in its color patterns, with a rusty crown, a dark eye line, and a pale eyebrow. The upper portion of the body is brownish-olive overall and the lower portion is grayish, making the bird extremely difficult to see in the forest undergrowth. Instead of flitting from branch to branch in search of insect prey as many other warblers do, these birds walk along the forest floor, scratching through the leaf litter, much like Ovenbirds do.

In the breeding season, a male may establish a territory as much as 45 acres in size, attempting to drive out other males of its species, using song, aggressive displays, and active chases through the vegetation. To attract a female to his territory, the male also uses song and displays, but, in this instance, they are designed to entice a prospective mate. The female does not appear to be strongly territorial, leaving territory establishment to the vigilant male.

Swainson's Warblers seem to have a monogamous mating system, but there are a few instances where polygyny is suspected, one male mating with multiple females. During the breeding season, members of a mated pair will often forage near each other, but, when nesting begins, the male tends to feed the female while she incubates the eggs.

The inconspicuous cup-shaped nest, constructed solely by the female, is made of leaves, rootlets, hair, Spanish moss, pine needles, vines, and other fine plant matter. It is located up to 4' above ground, sometimes near water, in the crotch of low-lying branches in dense habitat, usually comprised of rhododendron, arrowwood, holly, palmetto, pawpaw, pepperbush, mountain laurel, oak, yellow poplar, hemlock, and maple.

Three to seven unmarked white eggs are laid and incubated by the female for 13 - 15 days. The young hatch naked and blind and are fed and cared for by both adults for 10 - 12 days, at which time they fledge, leaving the nest and following the parents, who feed them for 2 to 3 additional weeks.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER March 2021

I hope everyone continues to be well and safe as we negotiate the new normal together on the eve of the second year of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is encouraging that the Covid-19 Vaccine distribution has increased. and I hope that most of you have been able to secure your vaccines.

Audubon Everglades will continue to err on the side of caution in scheduling in-person events or field trips, since our continued safety is our priority. We will continue to be in "flock-down" mode for the foreseeable future.

This month's speaker is Dr. Rindy Anderson of FAU, whose research centers on the social behavior, acoustic communication, and cognition of songbirds. She will be returning to tell us about "The Science of Animal Behavior: Why birds sing and why we study them, Part II" in a continuation of her fabulous December 2019 presentation.

We are happy to announce that two recent additions to the Audubon Everglades Board of Directors are Natasha Warraich, South Florida Water Management Scientist, who will be our wildlife expert, and Lauren Butcher, Green Schools Program Coordinator, Pine Jog Environmental Education Center, who will coordinate our education efforts.

Also, we were fortunate to have Jeanette Mitchell join the Audubon Everglades team and become our new Membership Chair. Jeanette successfully transitioned into her role with the mentorship of outgoing Membership Chair, Doreen LePage. During Doreen's four-year tenure, she successfully improved our interactions with members, better organized our membership database, and significantly grew the AE Membership ranks. Doreen, thank you for years of service as Membership Chair and for your brief but impactful tenure as President as you continue to serve Audubon Everglades.

Rick Schofield, our long time Field Trip Coordinator and a member of our Technology Committee, has decided to step down from this position. Rick has been an invaluable and dedicated volunteer and successfully grew, enhanced and organized our field trip program during his six-year tenure. While Rick will surely be missed, he has generously offered to "assist a replacement in whatever way is helpful to them without imposing my personal approach/methods." Rick, thank you for your many years of service to AE.

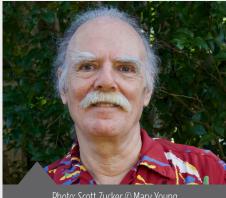


Photo: Scott Zucker © Mary Young

In order to continue to offer the wonderful variety of field trips that have become synonymous with Audubon Everglades, we are currently seeking a new field trip coordinator (and possibly a co-coordinator or assistant). With Rick's offer of support, we imagine a seamless transition by the time we are ready to resume field trips in September. If you are interested in volunteering to help continue AE's field trip excellence, please contact me at scott@auduboneverglades.org.

Volunteer Blue Kaufman will be offering a two-part book discussion in April and May on J Drew Lanham's novel The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature. Dr. Lanham was the keynote speaker at the 2020 Audubon Assembly. Please look for an Audubon Everglades email for more information and a link to sign up for these Zoom meetings, which will be limited to the first 12 registrants.

Sanctuary Chair Paul Davis will resume his annual rooftop nest monitoring efforts in April. If you'd like to help monitor the colonies of nesting Florida statedesignated threatened Least Terns and occasional Black Skimmers, please contact Paul at pwdavis9gmail.com.

The 2021 Florida Legislature session begins March 2. Now is an excellent time to contact your legislators to remind them that, when we protect the environment, we protect our quality of life. It is important that they recognize the need to conserve our land, water, wildlife, and access to affordable, renewable energy for all. Protecting our mature trees is more important than ever, since they play a critical role for foraging songbirds and in providing climate sequestration. HB 596 and HB 6023 would repeal a pernicious state rule that allows for the easy removal of these green giants. Please make your voices heard. You can find your local legislators here. And you can contact Governor Ron DeSantis here.

Please stay safe. And joyous birding! Scott Zucker. President

THURSDAY, MARCH 18, 2021 7PM **PROGRAM OPPORTUNITY**

FLORIDA'S MOST WANTED NON-NATIVE LARGE **CONSTRICTORS**

Why are big snakes taking over the Everglades? Which species are harmful, and how can you tell? Protecting South Florida's natural resources from invasive species like the Burmese python starts with you. Want to know more? Join us Thursday, March 18, 2021 at 7PM for a special presentation program with The University of Florida "Croc Docs" to learn about the history of invasive reptiles in Florida, how to identify native vs. non-native snakes, and what you should do if you see one. Audubon Everglades is collaborating with the UF "Croc Docs" to provide you with this unique learning opportunity.

To reserve your spot to participate, please register in advance by clicking on this link.

There will be a brief 5-minute survey following the Croc Docs presentation and Q&A. In order to participate in the survey, which helps further their research, please visit this consent agreement link that the University of Florida has provided.

To learn more about the program, please visit the UF Croc Docs.

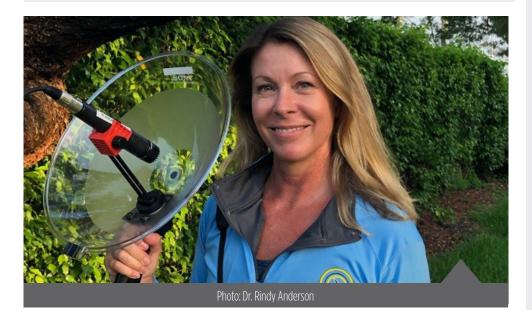
And for information about the program please Email Justin Dalaba.

Audubon Everglades Presents "The Science of Animal Behavior: why birds sing and why we study them, part II"

with speaker Dr. Rindy Anderson



Tuesday, March 2, 2021 at 7PM Zoom-Hosted Presentation (advance registration required)



Join us to hear Dr. Rindy Anderson speak about animal communication systems and why birdsong is an excellent model system for studying how and why animals do what they do. The March 2 presentation will be a continuation of the program Dr. Anderson presented in December 2019.

Dr. Rindy Anderson is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at Florida Atlantic University. She has a BS in Zoology from Arizona State University, an MS in Marine Science from the University of San Diego, and a PhD in Biology from the University of Miami. After obtaining her PhD, she worked as a postdoctoral research associate at Duke University before joining the faculty at FAU. Dr. Anderson and her students study the behavioral ecology of songbirds, with a focus on social behavior, acoustic communication, and cognition. Current projects include Bachman's Sparrows at Jonathan Dickinson State Park and Northern Cardinals in Broward County Parks.

PLANT OF THE MONTH

Corkystem Passion Vine Passiflora suberosa by Helen Laurence



Photo: Corkystem Passion Vine *(Passiflora suberosa)* © Scott Laurence

"Plants for Birds" are, in large measure, plants for caterpillars since caterpillars form the basis of most nestling birds' diets. Ashley Kennedy, one of Doug Tallamy's doctoral students, showed this conclusively in her 2019 dissertation, *Examining Breeding Bird Diets to Improve Avian Conservation Efforts*. This chart illustrates the results of Kennedy's research (used by permission of Doug Tallamy, Personal Communication, 9 February 10, 2021).

Essentially, it shows that caterpillars overwhelmingly predominate among a long list of other insect baby bird food in 16 of the 20 bird families studied. Only hummingbirds (who prefer flies), shrikes (grasshoppers and beetles), swallows (dragonflies), and kinglets (true bugs) have different dietary preferences. Kennedy's methodology included a brilliant use of citizen science, <u>including a Facebook</u> <u>page</u> to collect information about what birds eat.

The Corkystem Passion Vine is a powerhouse provider. Its blue-black berries provide food for birds, and it is a butterfly larval host plant for the Julia, Gulf Fritillary, and Zebra Longwing (our state butterfly) caterpillars. Corkystem fruits and flowers year-round. The small yellowish-green flowers are inconspicuous and delicate, possibly pollinated by wasps and bees, but also may be self-pollinating, according to Dr. George Rogers. This property may contribute to its

PROFILE: ROBERT FRANZINO

by Kristen Murtaugh



Robert Franzino is a new AE board member. For several years I have known him from the Wednesday morning bird walks at Loxahatchee, so it was fun to sit down with him (via Zoom) and find out more about his background. Robert was born in the Bronx and grew up in Cresskill, a small suburb in northern New Jersey. He enjoyed being a member of the first class of a new high school built in Cresskill. The 120 students had the advantages of a small school and the chance to establish school traditions, such as the mascot (Cougars). In such a small school, nearly everyone who wanted could play on a team. Robert played on the basketball, track and football teams. To give you an idea, his football team ended with an 0-8 record his senior year. As a child he enjoyed exploring the marshlands and the open spaces in his area. He wasn't interested in birds, though. He was looking down - at frogs, for example – not up in the sky. And he warned me, at this beginning of his biography, that the word "birder" would not enter his vocabulary or his selfidentification for decades.

Robert earned his undergraduate degree at Cornell University, with a major in government and comparative politics. He took the famous Biological Science 101 course taught by William Keeton, a zoologist known internationally for his work on bird migration and the homing pigeon's use of the earth's magnetic fields. Robert's experience visiting the huge barn full of pigeons at Cornell's Agricultural College did nothing, however, to spark an interest in birds. Neither did the presence of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology on campus (years later he would return to pay his respects and walk in Sapsucker Woods). Robert met his wife Barbara at Cornell. The two were married and moved to the University of Illinois at Urbana-

Champaign, where Robert pursued graduate studies in comparative politics and Latin American public policy. His advisor was an expert on Mexico, and Robert spent several summers on Ford Foundation research projects in Mexico and Colombia. Back in Urbana, after their son was born, Robert decided to take his knowledge of Latin America and his Spanish language skills in another direction. It was the late '70s, and there was growing interest in Latin American banking and investments. Robert earned his MBA at the University of Illinois in accounting and corporate finance and began a career in international finance. His career was varied and included work in large and small banks, in the insurance industry, at UBS, and at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). For most of his career, Robert's focus was on international loans and investments in developing countries, particularly in Latin America, but also in ex-Soviet countries. He worked in St. Louis, Detroit, Ft. Wayne, Indiana, and New York City. He and his family spent three years in Mexico City (where they enjoyed traveling in the country, but no birding). He did a lot of traveling to Latin America and even made a trip in the dead of winter to Siberia in Russia. He enjoyed those trips, where he met with interesting companies, government officials, and economists. He completed the 3-year Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) program, a high-level professional certificate offered to investment and financial professionals, and he obtained certification as a broker. There have been many challenging changes in the securities industry in the last few decades. Robert particularly relished work as a portfolio manager and enjoyed (most of the time) tracking his performance against other investment managers and indexes in the same asset class.

In 2005, Robert's daughter, who had an internship at the ACLU National Office in New York City, told him about a start-up position they had created. At the time, Robert and Barbara were thinking of moving back East. Both had grown up in the New York City area, and still had family there. The ACLU was looking for a Director of Banking and Investments. Robert would be the first to fill the office. The work involved overseeing the management of the endowment and the various retirement plans with the Investment Committee and the selection of investment managers; the position was attractive, and Robert landed it.

They settled in Greenwich, Connecticut. And finally, birds came into Robert's life. There are many parks in

the Greenwich area. The large Greenwich Audubon, a state office of the National Audubon, has a big education building, a Hawk Watch along the Atlantic Flyway, a summer camp, and lots of programs. (But not as many walks as Audubon Everglades!). In 2006, Robert underwent neck surgery that limited his activity but did not keep him from walking. He started going to some of the parks on Long Island Sound and was impressed with the first egrets and cormorants he saw. He signed up for a 6:30AM Greenwich Audubon walk along the trails during Fall migration. An inspiring naturalist led the group of ten birders. Robert was hooked, despite the worst case ever of "warbler neck." To make things even better, at about the same time his brother bought a second home near Cape May, providing even more great birding opportunities.

When Robert retired from the ACLU in 2015, he and Barbara decided to move to South Florida. Their son and his wife and 11-year-old daughter live in Miami. While they were house-hunting, Robert attended a meeting of Audubon Everglades and picked up a trip brochure. They took some walks on their own in Jupiter, and joined an Audubon walk in MacArthur Park (but not yet with Clive). Their real estate agent's son happened to be an intern at Green Cay. They bought a house in Boynton Beach just north of Wakodahatchee. I asked Robert my usual guestion about favorite birds. There were several species that he liked, but he was most enthusiastic about the White Ibis. They seem friendly, not belligerent with other birds, always happy and having fun. And there's nothing like watching them at the Loxahatchee Flyout. Robert uses eBird to see what birds are appearing at the hot spots, but he doesn't keep lists. He got more involved with Audubon Everglades when he joined Mary Young and Scott Zucker on the Conservation Committee. Robert brings strong investment experience to his work on the AE Board. He looks forward to reviewing the different types of assets the organization has and how they have been allocated. Let's welcome Robert and thank him for his commitment!

Snail Kite *(Rostrhamus sociabilis plumbeus)* – Federally Endangered

by Susan Faulkner Davis



Photo: Male Snail Kite with snail © Don Davis

I chose to begin my series on endangered Florida birds by writing about the Everglades Snail Kite, the mascot of Audubon Everglades. An endangered raptor, the Snail Kite is a bird that I have sought to observe many times. This bird is inextricably linked to the freshwater world of Florida's lakes, marshes, canals, seasonal wet savannas, retention ponds, and sloughs. Its diet consists almost exclusively of apple snails, which can be found there, but the apple snail populations are strongly affected by water flow, levels, and cleanliness.

The Snail Kite, iconic raptor of Florida's Everglades, can be spotted as it forages, flying low across expanses of wetlands and along shallow lake shores, its head down in search of its almost exclusive prey, the apple snail. In flight you notice the bird's broad, paddle-like wings; it flies slowly, with no need at all for speed. The wide band of white feathers at the base of its straight tail is an easily observable field mark.

The male is a deep slate gray; females and juveniles are brown on top, their chests and faces streaked with lighter colors. The juveniles are brown and buff, the females, which are browner and whiter, usually have distinctive white eyebrows. Both adults have red eyes and long, hook-like curved beaks. Closer inspection reveals long, thin talons curved like the beaks.

The shape of the distinctively curved beak of the Snail Kite and its matching talons evolved over millennia alongside the Florida apple snail (Pomacea paludosa). As the Kite hunts, it looks for the snails, which live just under the surface of the water (at about a 6" depth), clinging to aquatic vegetation. The Snail Kite spots the snail with its keen raptor's eyes

continued on page 6

Plant of the Month continued from page 3

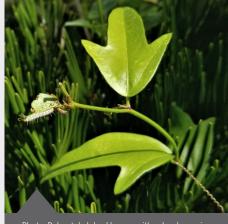


Photo: Palmately lobed leaves with zebra longwing caterpillars © Scott Laurence

classification as a non-native invasive aggressive vine in Melanesia, Hawaii, SE Asia, India, South Africa & Australia. It does propagate easily by seed here at home, probably spread by birds or small mammals, since it has colonized areas in our yard far from the original plants, but we're always happy to see it wherever it pops up.

The name Corkystem refers to the fact that mature stems develop a light brown bark that resembles cork. The vine has tendrils and will climb trees and trellises but is content to sprawl along the ground as well. The attractive evergreen leaves may be variously oval, lanceolate, and palmately lobed, sometimes all on the same plant!

Local native plant nurseries:

Meadow Beauty Nursery 5782 Ranches Road, Lake Worth, FL Tel: 561-601-9673

> Native Choice Nursery Tel: 561-756-4370

Indian Trails Nursery 6315 Park Lane West, Lake Worth, FL Tel: 561-641-9488

D.R. Bates Liners and Gallons 17639 64th Place N. Loxahatchee, FL Tel: 561-790-3246



Photo: Female Snail Kite hunting © Susan Faulkner Davis

Snail Kite continued from page 5

and drops down to retrieve the snail from the water with its specialized talons that grasp and cradle the round shell perfectly. Flying to a favorite perch, the Snail Kite then uses its long beak (slightly off center) to extract the snail meat from the shell. Kites will continue hunting in a spot where they find a high density of snails.

Just as the Snail Kite is closely tied to its food source, the snail is completely dependent on the health of Florida's watery inland ecosystems that run down the center of the state from mid-peninsula to south Florida. The lakes and rivers there collect rainwater, and the overflow heads south into Lake Okeechobee. Before that shallow lake was forever changed by the dike installed to halt the flow, freshwater used to spill over its southern lip and continue its flow southward into the vast Everglades river of grass. From the early 1800s through the early 1900s, before men intervened with nature in Florida, the Snail Kite was reported as locally abundant.



Photo: Female Snail Kite perched © Susan Faulkner Davis

In the U.S. our subspecies (one of three subspecies) is found only in central and south Florida in a range restricted to the watersheds of the Everglades, Lakes Okeechobee and Kissimmee, and the upper St. Johns River. It is considered a single population with considerable shifts. The Snail Kite population began to decline rapidly and steadily in the 1930s, a direct result of widespread drainage and conversion of wetlands for agricultural use. By 1965, the remaining population consisted of 20 or fewer Kites. In 1967 the Snail Kite subspecies in the U.S. was federally listed as an endangered species, entitled to the protection that designation brings. The population has fluctuated up and down since then from a low in 1972 of 75 birds to a high of 3.000 in 1999. The latest population estimate, according to Cornell, is around 1.000 birds.

Because hydrologic conditions in individual areas fluctuate frequently and Kites are basically nonmigratory, they must rely on a system of available wetlands, some of which are used only in the lean times. Kites wander during drought. looking for a place with an abundance of the snails they need. The apple snails, in turn, depend on fresh, clean water. Kites hunt by sight so the water must be clear. In a study at UF by Ellen Robertson and Robert Fletcher, it was found that 90% of the birds that had to wander did not reproduce. The Snail Kite helps researchers gauge if the Everglades and other hydrologic systems have adequate water. They band many individuals as part of their study.

Globally, Snail Kites are assessed as a species of low conservation concern, with a worldwide population of 2 million. It is the Florida subspecies that is endangered. Disruption of water flow, which impacts habitat and snail populations, is the main cause. As Florida's human population burgeons, our resident Kites are more at risk. In South Florida the drainage of the Everglades, restricted water flow in the National Park, and increasing development in Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties are decreasing Snail Kite habitat. Poor water quality, toxic urban agricultural runoff, bacterial toxins, and human harassment and encroachment into nesting areas are further challenges to the Snail Kite's survival.

The dilemma of our Snail Kite is both simple and complex. It is a specialist that feeds almost exclusively on apple snails. Apple snails evolved to need clean, clear, shallow water to survive and thrive. Degradation of our water quality and interruption of the flow of Florida's waters, particularly in the Everglades, have sent us a wakeup call in the form of the lovely, unique and endangered raptor, the Snail Kite. The water issues linked to the decline of this handsome bird affect us all, as does the loss of wetland habitat.

You can make a difference by getting involved, advocating at the state and local level for clean water and Everglades restoration. These are urgent concerns for us all.

Recommended reading for understanding the plight of our Snail Kite:

Online Articles:

- University of Florida
- Article by Mac Stone and Alisa Opar
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation
 Commission
- Fish and Wildlife Service (US)
- National Park Service

Books:

The Swamp - Michael Grunwald "The Swamp is the stunning story of the destruction and possible resurrection of the Everglades, the saga of man's abuse of nature in southern Florida and his unprecedented efforts to make amends. Michael Grunwald, a prize-winning national reporter for The Washington Post, takes readers on a riveting journey from the Ice Ages to the present, illuminating the natural, social and political history of one of America's most beguiling but least understood patches of land."

Paving Paradise - Craig Pittman and Matthew Waite "This is an exhaustive, timely, and devastating account of the destruction of Florida's wetlands, and the disgraceful collusion of government at all levels. It's an important book that should be read by every voter, every taxpayer, every parent, every Floridian."

Welcome Home Purple Martins!

by Shelly Rozenberg



While on a ladder, cleaning out the Purple Martin house at Wakodahatchee Wetlands early morning January 3, I was serenaded with the musical dawn song of three Purple Martins circling overhead. Purple Martin season had officially begun! I breathed a sigh of relief, knowing this trio had survived the long journey from South America. With my scrub brush in hand, I carefully stepped down the ladder and gazed toward the sky, observing their aerial acrobatics. I suddenly realized there was still much work to do and climbed back up the ladder to line the compartments with pine needles. With a series of rapid flaps and graceful glides the Purple Martins spiraled closer to the house as if to inspect my housekeeping. With a happy heart, I looked up and said, "Welcome Home."

I returned home to access my account with the Purple Martin Conservation Association and reported the "Scout" sighting at Wakodahatchee to their Scout Arrival and Migration Study. Scouts are the oldest male and female Purple Martins and first to arrive. Scouts return to the same site they nested in the previous year. Others will rest when migrating through to their final breeding location. Wakodahatchee has always been one of the earliest locations for Scout arrivals in North America. The younger birds that fledged the prior year will return 4 to 12 weeks after the Scouts in search of a breeding location.

If you build it, they will come

Purple Martins are native songbirds and the largest member of the swallow family in North America. They are social, colonial birds, and their tolerance for humans makes them one of the most popular and loved birds. Unfortunately, their population has seriously declined for reasons that are not well known, but competition with Starlings and House Sparrows for nesting sites might be a contributing factor. Purple Martins nest almost exclusively in human-supplied housing east of the Rockies during breeding season. Audubon Everglades is extremely grateful to have nine collaborative partners working to increase Purple Martin populations throughout Palm Beach County. Their work begins in Winter, when housing gets cleaned and prepped, and ends in Summer, when the final baby fledges. Nest checks and counts are conducted throughout the season. Heather Moody and Emilie Travis at Okeeheelee Nature Center reported seeing their first three Purple Martins checking out their recently relocated housing. Lorraine Starr at Palm Beach County Fire Rescue Stations 25 and 27 in Wellington recently made some modifications to her housing and has reported some happy Scouts. Sean Mallee and Lila Varel of Daggerwing Nature Center have also welcomed Scouts. At last count, 25 Scouts arrived at Peaceful Waters Sanctuary, and we are extremely grateful to Scott Fletcher and the Village of Wellington for all their great work at Peaceful Waters and Wellington Environmental Preserve. Alan and Cherie Summersgill at Epiphany Lutheran Church recently installed new housing and are anxiously waiting for their first arrivals. Riverbend Park has not yet seen occupancy but are hoping this will be their year. Audubon Everglades recently received approval for a much-needed second house at Wakodahatchee Wetlands, and, although we have had some supplier issues due to Corvid, we are hoping to install this house in the near future.

A heartfelt thank you to all our collaborative partners for their support and dedication to the continued conservation of our beloved Purple Martins. Sometimes living in harmony with nature means offering a little help, and the Purple Martins are reliant on humans to survive. If you are in a public location and interested in becoming a collaborative partner or if you want to start your own backyard colony, please contact Shelly Rozenberg.

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