EVERGLADE KITE NEWSLETTER

Monthly Newsletter for Audubon Everglades
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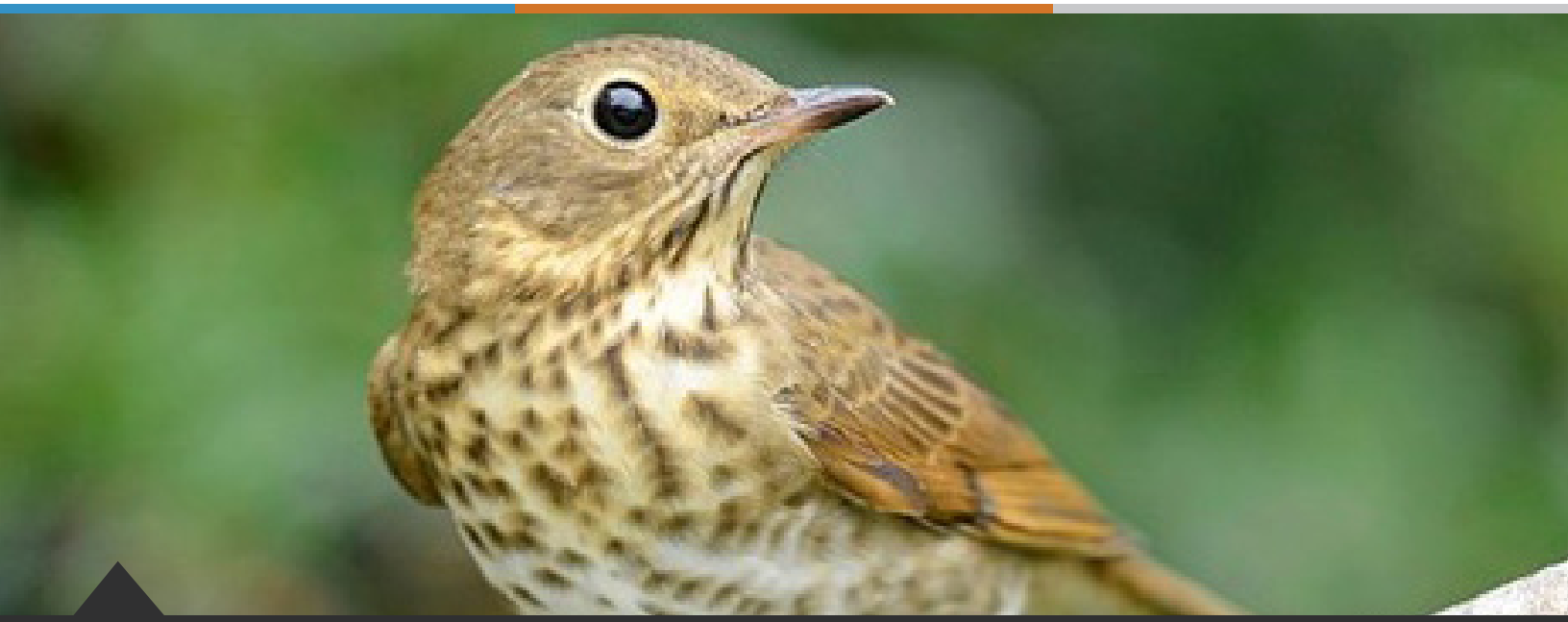

Photo: Swainson's Thrush © Wikipedia

Bird of the Month: Swainson's Thrush *(Catharus ustulatus)*

by Clive & Celecia Pinnock

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.

These shy, cryptically colored woodland birds are more often heard than seen. Largely arboreal, they forage among the branches and leaves of forest trees for berries (elderberries, raspberries, blackberries, and others), insects, and other arthropods (caterpillars, beetles, ants, crickets, flies and moths). They will also spend a considerable period of time on or near the ground gleaning insects from dense undergrowth and stumps. Insects and a variety of fruits make up the diet during the breeding season, but fruit becomes the staple during the winter.

Measuring approximately seven inches in length, the Swainson's Thrush is olive-gray above with buffy lores and eye rings which extend in front of the eyes, creating "spectacles." The bird also has a buffy breast with dark spots, brownish gray sides, and a whitish throat that is bordered by a brown stripe on either side. Its round head, short straight bill, fairly long wings, and medium-length tail, place it in a category which is similar in appearance to many of the other thrush species. Regional differences within the Swainson's Thrush species are seen in the variation of subtle plumage changes.

During the breeding season, the birds inhabit moist woodlands and swamps in mixed deciduous and coniferous forests in the far North and mountainous West, but they are largely widespread throughout the country during migration. At this time, the birds use swamp forests, canyon bottoms, lake edges, and parks. Winter habitat includes primary and old second-growth tropical forests of Central and South America.

Swainson's Thrushes nest in dense shaded areas in the forest understory, placing their nests 3 – 10 feet off the ground. The nest is built in a variety of plants, including willow, fir, spruce, blackberry, alder, oak and aspen. The male first arrives on the breeding grounds, establishing a territory and defending it by singing, which also functions to attract a receptive, potential mate.

The nest (built solely by the female), is placed on a horizontal branch and is a bulky, open cup of twigs, bark strips, moss, grass, and leaves with some mud added. The nest is lined with bark fibers, lichens, animal hair, and other soft material. Three to five pale blue eggs with dark spots (at the large end) are laid and incubated for 12 – 14 days by the female. Both parents care for the young (hatched blind and partially covered with down), which leave the nest in 10 – 13 days after hatching.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

May 2021

Greetings everyone!
Migration is in full swing as we wish our winter avian residents safe journey and welcome the songbirds and shorebirds who will traveling up our coast along the Atlantic Flyway as they make their way north. Some of you as well already have or will be migrating to parts unknown, and we want to wish you safe travels and remind you that you can continue to enjoy our monthly programs and special program presentations virtually. To make our presentation available to more of our members and subscribers, we have increased our Zoom subscription to accommodate larger audiences.

2021 April Annual Meeting
We held our April Annual Meeting virtually this past month, and we are pleased to announce that the full slate of officers and directors was unanimously accepted 52-0, and the 2021-22 Budget was accepted 53-1. Thank you, Mary Young, for chairing the Nominating Committee and putting together this year's impressive slate of officers, and thank you, Louann Dillon, for drafting this year's comprehensive budget. The meeting also featured wildlife expert and media personality, Ron Magill, who did not disappoint.

New AE Board Members
Congratulations to all the elected officers and board members who were elected. The new directors joining the Board are Michele Bachoon, who will be chairing the Plants for Birds Committee, Marianne Gabel, who will be co-chairing the Program Committee with me, and Susan Kennedy, who will be co-chairing the Conservation Committee with Mary Young. In addition, Sabeena Beg, who joined the AE Board in January, will now serve as our First Vice-President and chair the Communications Committee.

New Science Advisory Committee
Audubon Everglades is proud to announce the launching of the Science Advisory Committee, which will be chaired by our Sanctuary Chair Paul Davis, Retired Director of Coastal Region for PBC ERM and Biologist. Joining Paul on the Committee will be Board Liaison Natasha Warraich, SFWMD Scientist and Biologist, and Dr. Mark Cook, SFWMD Scientific Section Lead of the Systemwide Everglades Research Group and Ornithologist. The goals of the Committee are to help the AE Board understand issues using best science, to help create volunteer stewardship opportunities and develop future environmental advocates, and to suggest conservation related opportunities, including ones in underserved communities.

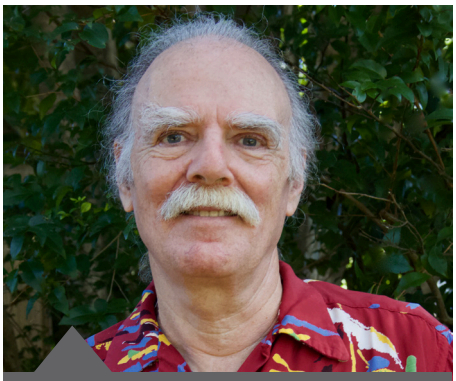
Photo: Scott Zucker © Mary Young

Plants for Birds Demonstration Gardens
Audubon Everglades has been in talks with Bush Wildlife Sanctuary about partnering on a Plants for Birds Demonstration Garden at their new facility on Indian Town Road, which is slated to open in March 2022. Sabeena Beg has been championing the project, and the Plants for Birds Committee, which includes Chair Michelle Bachoon, Sabeena, Natasha Warraich, Lauren Butcher, Mary Young and Scott Zucker, met recently with Bush Wildlife Executive Director Amy Knight and Assistant Director Lisa Wynne to discuss grant proposals and volunteer involvement and map out the proposed location of the Garden.

The Demonstration Teaching Garden that we are developing in partnership with Pine Jog Environmental Education Center under the leadership of Lauren Butcher recently completed the tagging of the existing plants in the facility's garden area. Richard Moyroud, who will be our May 4 Monthly Meeting featured speaker, directed the final stage of the process. Additionally, volunteers participated in a garden clean up on April 18 to prepare the site for the installation of new plants.

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

If you are a current member of the Friends of Audubon Everglades and have not yet renewed your membership for the June 1, 2021 - May 31, 2022 membership year, you will be receiving an email at the beginning of May asking you to renew on the secure Audubon Everglades membership web page. Membership in Friends now includes the ability to participate in all Photography Group activities listed on the Audubon Everglades Photography Group page for no additional fee and AEPG Facebook Page.

In an effort to save time and money for our volunteers, there will be no printed paper mail-in applications. If you need assistance renewing your membership, click here.

You can safely and securely renew your membership here using a credit card or a PayPal account.

PLANT OF THE MONTH

Six-Angle Dicliptera/False Mint
Dicliptera sexangularis

by Helen Laurence


Photo: Dicliptera © C.J. McCartney

I bought a Dicliptera sexangularis from Meadow Beauty Nursery a few years ago, entranced by the delicate beauty and vibrant color of the flower. It is easily established and grows readily in sun or shade if it receives adequate moisture. In our garden, Dicliptera starts blooming in late February, eventually attaining a height of 2-3 feet.

But over the years I have developed an ambivalent relationship with Dicliptera. I love them because their graceful tubular form and deep pink color are so inviting to hummingbirds. I love them because they bloom prolifically and create an enchanting rosy haze in their corner of the garden. I love them most of all because, after they have gone to seed and just when you are thinking you should pull them out or cut them back, they are discovered by many small seedeaters. We rarely see Painted Buntings in our Wellington-area garden, but, during spring migration last year, a male Painted Bunting appeared and gorged himself all afternoon on our seedy Dicliptera, occasioning great excitement in the household. This alone makes up for Dicliptera's sometimes less than lovable behavior.

Dicliptera displays an extreme propensity for territorial domination. In other words, it is boisterously weedy. If you plant it once, you will have it everywhere, forever. This plant unequivocally dispels the myth of the maintenance-free native

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Audubon Everglades Presents Guest Speaker Richard Moyroud

Owner, Mesozoic Landscapes, Inc., Lake Worth, Fla.

MAY 04 Tuesday, May 4, 2021 at 7PM
Zoom-Hosted Presentation
(advance registration required)

Photo: Ron Magill and Eagle Owl

In 1981, Richard established Mesozoic Landscapes, Inc. specifically to research, grow and promote plants native to South Florida. He is active in plant propagation, consulting, restoration landscape design, and writing. And much, much more.

Among his many published writings, he is co-author of "Xeric Landscaping with Florida Native Plants," a guide to using native plant communities as the basis for environmentally-sound landscape design. First published in 1991, it is still in print and widely used. An excellent example of his native and restorative landscaping work is the Hypoluxo Hammock. This coastal hammock park was dedicated on March 9,1996 and is easily viewed on the south side of the Hypoluxo Town Hall.

Richard is a charter member of the local chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS). He served two years as president, edited the newsletter for more than a decade, and worked on campaigns to secure funds for the purchase and protection of natural areas. In 1990, while Conservation Chair of FNPS, he was appointed to the Endangered Plant Advisory Council (EPAC) under the Florida Commissioner of Agriculture. He continues to serve on EPAC and has chaired the group since his initial appointment.

Richard is also a charter member of the Association of Florida Native Nurseries, and in 1995 he was appointed to the Natural Areas Management Advisory Committee. He served as Chairman for four years and continues to serve on the committee to this day.

Old Growth Forest in Palm Beach- Bingham Islands
This is an ecosystem that has remained unaltered from before the arrival of settlers in the area. Six natural islands (not spoil islands) in the Lake Worth Lagoon have remained essentially unchanged, thanks to preservation by the original owners, the Potter brothers in 1881 and then the Bingham family since 1893. Commonly called the "Bingham Islands," they were leased to Florida Audubon to be maintained as a bird sanctuary. The largest island is just south of the Southern Boulevard Causeway and was protected by a fence. Until the past few years, there was no management of these mangrove islands, and invasive pest-plants choked out old Green Buttonwood and mangrove trees. Now, there is a long-term management plan and almost all exotics have been removed, allowing healthy regrowth of native trees. Wildlife is being documented, and we hope to see a return of nesting pelicans and other birds reported 140 years ago.

Plant continued from page 2

garden. There is no such thing as a maintenance-free garden, native or not. Native plants, if they are planted in the right place, generally require less watering and less fertilizing than non-natives, but they still must be dead headed (empty seed heads removed), weeded, and pruned back or pulled out when spent. The good news is that Dicliptera is easy to pull out, even when mature.

When we plant a garden, we create and alter an ecosystem, and we must learn to recognize and honor how plants interact with one another and with the world of insects and birds they support. The ecosystem services and wildlife value offered by Dicliptera outweigh the possible inconvenience posed by its assertive character. With the understanding, then, that you will need to ride herd on your Dicliptera, diligently removing it when it shows up en masse in distant corners of the garden, this lovely plant makes a rewarding addition to the more informal Plants for Birds landscape.

Florida Burrowing Owls

(Athene cunicularia floridana)

State threatened

Second in a series of articles on Florida's endangered or threatened birds – Part II

Florida Burrowing Owls are increasingly urban creatures. They once lived in the dry prairies and along coastal ridges, places Gopher Tortoises also find attractive. Those prime spots were soon filled by humans and their agricultural endeavors. The displaced owls were drawn southward as Florida was transformed. The swamp/wetland habitat was dredged, the water channeled away via a vast series of man-made canals. All else was filled and leveled to become elevated, bare dry land. South Florida was ready for occupation. Before people and buildings with lawns and landscaping, before massive agriculturalization, sunbaked and sparse of vegetation, it was paradise in the eyes of the Florida Burrowing Owls: They now live on the west coast in Cape Coral and Marco Island. On the east coast they live from Miami to the Palm Beaches, but Broward County is the stronghold. There are millions of people in these areas. There are fewer owls. Even as adorable as they are, many people don't want them as neighbors, given their "threatened" species status. Florida Burrowing Owls occupy their piece of real estate all year around. It's not a seasonal "nest" as with other owls. It's their permanent home.

Nesting

Nesting season for Florida Burrowing Owls runs from late December to May. They choose the dry season for its lack of rain, which can devastate burrows. Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) says "The typical breeding season for the Florida burrowing owl is February 15 to July 10, though owls can breed earlier or later"- important dates for the "take and mitigation" rules which FWC put in place to protect this threatened species via permitting.

Burrowing Owls are sexually mature their first year and breed once a year. They generally mate for life but will take another mate if the situation arises. The happy couple announce their intentions to breed by decorating the space around the burrow entrance. What looks like trash to us is the owls' way to declare their resolution. Decorations vary according to individual taste and availability. Burrowing Owls will use paper, plastic and metallic wrapper bits, pieces of fabric, colored plastic, or small metal objects. One Burrowing Owl couple, whose family has been multi-generational residents at an elementary school, favors wads of white paper and colorful elastic hair bands from little girls. These decorations can also become nesting material, tucked away deep in the burrow.

At nesting time, parental duties diverge. Males become food providers for the burrow-bound female as she first lays then incubates between 2-12 eggs. He is also the protector of the burrow. A male's plumage can appear lighter than female's plumage at this time, sunbaked from spending long hours outside of the burrow on guard duty. The female lays her clutch of eggs generally within the period of a week and then begins to brood. She will spend about 28 days brooding the eggs before they hatch. Neonates are covered in sparse white down and their eyes are closed. After hatching, the male owl continues to supply food to all. It will be another 2 or so weeks before the owlets, with newly opened eyes and forming feathers, will

Photo: © Susan Faulkner Davis

venture to the burrow opening and cautiously emerge to interact with their new world.

The burrow is maintained every day by the female. Loose dirt is removed, kicked up and out by the Florida Burrowing Owl's strong feet. Vegetation around the mound is cropped close, and bits of dried dung may be intentionally placed where the decorations had been. Insects attracted to the odor quickly become fast-food for the owl's hungry brood. The dung may also serve to ward off predators. The female can now venture away from the burrow, making only quick trips for exercise and to hunt still more food. For the most part she will tend the burrow and owlets. She knows the male will keep watch. Out of the burrow, the youngsters begin a steep learning curve. The male Florida Burrowing Owl now steps into his role as teacher. The playful antics we see as we watch the owlets are all part of "Owl School." Owlets have about a month, once they emerge from the burrow, to learn survival skills - who is friend, who is foe, what's good to eat, how to capture prey to grow strong, and how to fly. They join

Photo: © Susan Faulkner Davis

their parents in constantly scanning the skies for aerial predators. Florida Burrowing owlets can sustain flight at around 7 weeks of age and hunt their own food at nine weeks of age. Once they are self-sufficient, they will remain in their parents' territory to hunt. In Florida, Burrowing Owls are homebodies, staying in their own neighborhood even though they are skilled fliers.

Urban Life and Threats

Of all the threats to Florida Burrowing Owls, continued habitat loss is the greatest. Open spaces are prime locations for development, and the welfare of the resident animal population is frequently an afterthought. Almost all are displaced during development.

Given their penchant for large open spaces with sparse, low vegetation and few trees, it's no wonder they are attracted to some of the unusual places they call home. They are looking for open spaces with an unimpeded 360-degree view from a prospective burrow. Topping the list of locations of their choice are airports, parks and playgrounds, school yards/athletic fields, and golf courses. They also view vacant lots, front lawns and agricultural areas as suitable home sites. Owls living in urbanized settings have shorter life spans than the 6 to 8 years of their country cousins, perhaps by as much as 50 percent. They hunt for insects under streetlights, they hunt under the lights of airport runways and pursue insects stirred up by jet wash from engines as planes take off and land. This is perilous behavior for little owls; they are struck by cars and killed by planes.

Other threats include harassment by humans and predation by pet cats and dogs. The growing iguana population in South Florida also impacts Burrowing Owls. The much larger iguanas will routinely push nesting owls from their burrows, making them theirs by laying their eggs inside. Then they dig out the end of the burrow to exit the narrow space, which is too tight for them to turn around in, and they seal both entrances.

Lawn maintenance crews inadvertently collapse the shallow burrows with heavy mowing equipment, as do golf carts and foot traffic. Burrows can flood and collapse on their own, trapping owls. During the dry (nesting) season, heavy rains that fall unexpectedly ahead of the rainy season spell certain doom to eggs or nestlings.

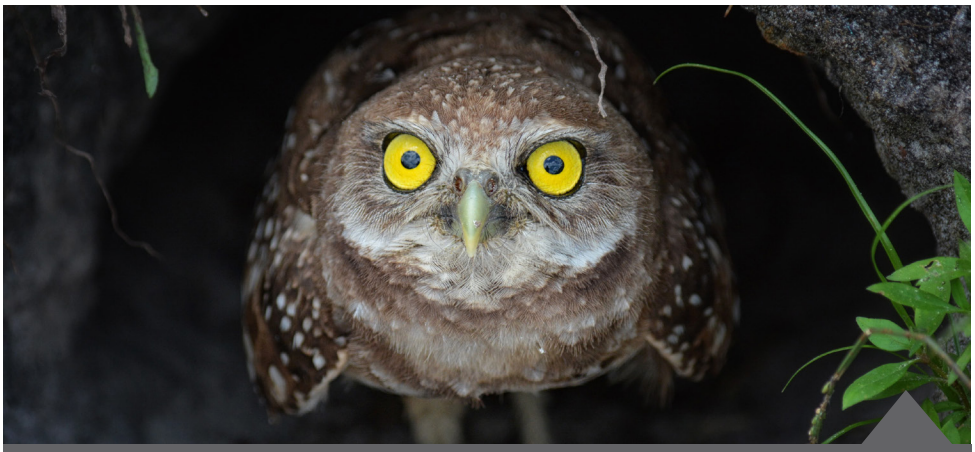

Photo: © Susan Faulkner Davis

Pesticides, herbicides and rodenticides are commonly used in most of the places where the owls choose to live, but there are no studies to show how that usage affects our Florida Burrowing Owls over the short or long term. In fact, Florida Burrowing Owls are not well-studied birds, and there is little available, current documentation on them being published.

Finally, there are the natural avian predators of Florida Burrowing Owls - larger owls and a variety of hawks. Foxes and raccoons also hunt the little owls. Clearly, being an urban Burrowing Owl is risky business.

How To Help

Where Burrowing Owls live in Florida and where there are sizable dedicated open areas in the city and suburbs with mowed grass, limited and educated pesticide usage, educated and caring lawn maintenance crews, few trees in which predators can hide, Burrowing Owls can safely live. In those places the installation of artificial burrows has allowed counties and cities with governments which support "Owl Guardians" to slowly and steadily increase the population over the past 10 years,

Project Perch, a South Florida Audubon endeavor headed by wildlife biologists Kelly Heffernan and Dr Brian Mealy and joined by Audubon Everglades, is actively engaged in protecting and conserving Florida Burrowing Owls in SE Florida. We build sturdy artificial burrows and work with homeowners and organizations to install burrows in safe places. We also provide educational guidance for dealing with this threatened and state-protected species. We build artificial burrows with nest chambers that are designed for the specific environmental conditions of south Florida. They are virtually crush/collapse proof and drain rapidly after heavy rains.

Project Perch/Audubon Everglades needs volunteer members who can help us build the artificial burrows, and dig them into the ground, in addition to serving as owl guardians. If you are interested in helping us or if you spot Florida Burrowing Owls in Palm Beach County in need of protection, please email us at projectperchpbc@auduboneverglades.org or call Mary Young at 561-876-8815.

Links for further reading:

Project Perch - South Florida Audubon

Links to information including ones which explain the protections FWC affords the owls under their "State Threatened" status.