



EVERGLADE KITE

NEWSLETTER

Monthly Newsletter for Audubon Everglades

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Photo: Gambel's Quail © Wikipedia

Bird of the Month: Gambel's Quail

(Callipepla gambelii)

by Clive & Celecia Pinnock

The 2021 Bird of the Month Series continues to focus on 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 PowerPoint presentation at each monthly meeting.

The Sonoran, Mohave, and Chihuahuan Deserts of the American Southwest are the homes of the gregarious Gambel's Quail. This plump, volleyball-sized bird with a short neck, a small bill, short broad wings, and a squared tail is often found in coveys (small groups of varying sizes), feeding along brushy washes and cactus-studded arroyos. Both the male and female sport a black tear-drop shaped crest (fuller in the male) atop their small heads. Other plumage colors include a bright rufous crown, chestnut flanks with white stripes, and a cream-

colored belly with a black patch (worn only by the male). The female is grayer, lacking the strong head pattern.

The Gambel's Quail is often observed walking or running along the ground near desert streams and water holes, coveys traveling to the water in the morning and evening to satisfy their thirst. Feeling more secure on the ground, the birds would rather run than fly, but, when they do, it is usually when they are startled or alarmed by a potential predator. At those times, the flights are explosive, powerful, and short. Otherwise, flights are confined to short "hops" up to roosting sites or across barriers such as canyons.

Their diet consists predominantly of plant material, including leaves, buds, shoots, grasses, a variety of seeds, berries, and cactus fruits (cholla, saguaro, and prickly pear). They have also been known to pick

mesquite seeds from cattle and coyote droppings. This diet is supplemented with insects in the spring, especially during the nesting season. Young Gambel's Quail consume only animal matter for the first few days after hatching. Their diet includes beetles, small worms, moth caterpillars, and grasshoppers.

As the breeding season approaches, the coveys dismantle, and each male, in order to establish his own breeding territory, finds an elevated perch – often a fence post, tree, or shrub – and gives what is known as a "cow call." Courting males also perform a ritualized foraging display called "tidbitting" to attract a mate. As the female approaches, the tidbitting male extends his legs, fans his tail, and stands with his head near the ground and his tail in the air. He may also offer the female bits of food.

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

August 2021

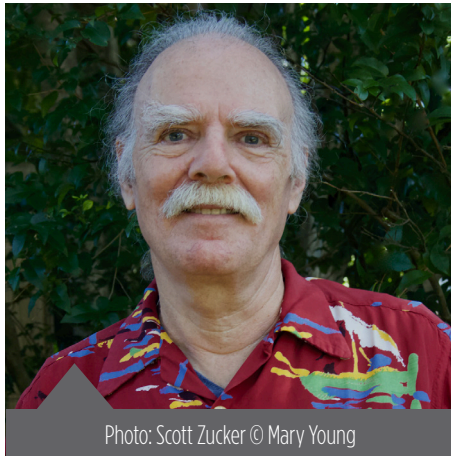


Photo: Scott Zucker © Mary Young

Greetings, everyone!

July has been a quiet month, except for Tropical Storm Elisa's early wake-up call to South Floridians, announcing that hurricane season is here. Fortunately, she missed our coast.

Delta Variant of Covid Virus

Just when life seemed to be more normal again, it appears that the United States is currently experiencing a fourth wave of the Covid-related virus with the Delta variant, which is now accounting for most new cases. While reports indicate that those who are fully vaccinated are by and large safe from severe outcomes, should they contract the more infectious Delta variant, the long term affects to those fully vaccinated who contract it remain unknown. Other virulent variants like the Lambda, which is now the dominant Covid strain in Peru, continue to emerge. A recent White House report indicated that Florida accounts for approximately 20% of all new U.S. Covid cases, so please continue to take the necessary precautions to stay safe.

Tuesday, August 3, 7 PM Zoom Monthly Meeting

Get ready to explore the *Hidden Wild* in your own backyard. This month's general meeting will feature

biologist and ERM Public Outreach Program Supervisor, Benji Studt, along with members of the Day's Edge Film production crew and cast for a viewing and discussion with Q & A of their multi-award-winning film, *Hidden Wild*, which begins in a Palm Beach County Natural Area.

June Challenge Wrap

Congratulations to Audubon Everglades members who participated in the statewide June Challenge to see how many bird species a birder can see in their county in the month of June! Great job Vicki Rogerson, Paula Gatrell, and Gael Silverblatt! Vicki's total placed her 9th in the state. Palm Beach County results (total species/non-ABA species):

- Vicki Rogerson, 115 (114/1)
- Paula Gatrell, 103 (101/2)
- Gael Silverblatt, 90 (90/0)

Field trips

Audubon Everglades is currently scheduling a robust assortment of birding, photography, and science-related field trips for this fall. If you are interested in leading a field trip for our 2021-22 season, which starts October, please contact our Field Trip Scheduler, Paula Gatrell, at Paula@auduboneverglades.org.

Amazon Smile

We continue to receive many donations from Amazon, thanks to your use of their special Amazon Smile program when ordering. As of May 2021, the donations have totaled \$789.51, a great resource for us. To get started using Amazon Smile, simply go to "Smile. Amazon.com," sign in, indicate Audubon Everglades as your agency of choice, and bookmark the page. From then on, when you are ready to explore Amazon, click on your bookmarked "Smile" page, and you are ready to order. They will send us a percentage of your sales without your paying anything extra. We appreciate your donations when you use this site. Thank you!

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The ground nest, typically selected by the female, is a shallow depression lined with grass, leaves, and twigs and placed beneath a shrub or in a clump of cactus or other protective vegetation. The ten to twelve or more eggs are dull white to pale buff in color and are heavily marked with brown. Two females may sometimes lay their eggs in the same nest. The eggs are incubated by the female for 21 to 24 days. The precocial down-covered young leave the nest within a day after hatching. The chicks are cared for by both parents; the adult birds

lead the chicks to food sources (insects and other invertebrates), but the young feed themselves. The young can make short flights at 10 days but are not fully grown until later. One brood is raised per year on average.

Although considered socially monogamous, some females desert their mates and their brood to take a new mate and lay another clutch of eggs, leaving the original partner to raise the chicks on his own.

PLANT OF THE MONTH

Firebush

Hamelia patens var. *patens*

by Helen Laurence

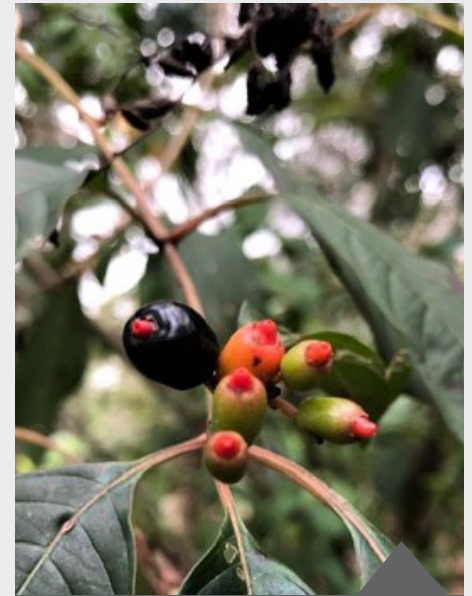


Photo: Firebush fruit © Helen Laurence

An understory plant, the versatile firebush will grow to a height of 15-20 feet, with a bushy or shrubby aspect that may become leggy. It can be pruned severely and will happily flush out again with no ill-effects, or it can be pruned into a standard tree shape. Firebush is a fast grower, easy to grow, thrives equally well in full sun or shade, and is tolerant of poor soil and drought, although it prefers moister conditions.

And look at those plump, juicy firebush fruits! You can understand why firebush spreads so readily – the fruits are attractive to birds, especially mockingbirds, catbirds, and blue-headed vireos; they eat the fruits and then disperse the seeds. The tubular flowers are a nectar source for hummingbirds as well as butterflies; the leaves are eaten by the caterpillars of the Pluto Sphinx, a hummingbird-like moth, [according to Roger Hammer](#). With such impressive wildlife bona fides, it's surprising that Firebush is not among the plants listed for our zip code in the [Audubon Native Plants Database](#). Perhaps it has to do with the Mystery of the Native vs. Non-native Firebush, or as Roger Hammer puts it, "The Hamelia Mess."

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“Hidden Wild”

Presented by Palm Beach County Environmental Resources Management, The Palm Beaches of Florida, and Day’s Edge Productions

**AUG
03**

Tuesday, August 3, 2021 at 7PM
Zoom-Hosted Presentation

6:45-7PM Social time with fellow members and presenters



We invite you to join us for a special program and screening of the beautiful and inspiring documentary “Hidden Wild,” presented by Executive Producers Benji Studt and Sergio Piedra. They share this about the film, “One of the amazing things about ‘Hidden Wild’ is how it brought together such a diverse group to champion public lands and conservation and serves as an inspiration for viewers to connect with their local natural spaces.”

Following the screening you will have the unique opportunity to meet the “Hidden Wild” Expeditioners, Filmmakers, and Producers during a Q&A.

“Hidden Wild”

Behind the homes and freeways of suburban Palm Beach County, an incredible network of swamps,

scrub, and waterways lies waiting to be discovered. Hidden Wild follows science educator Alex Freeze as she leads three South Florida students on an expedition through the wilderness hidden in their own backyards. Join Noah, Kiana, and Kourtez as they paddle down the Wild & Scenic Loxahatchee River, wade through ancient cypress swamps, and witness the life-giving power of fire in Florida scrub. It’s a tough journey, filled with mosquito bites and sore feet, but along the way these students discover a passion for Florida’s wildlands.

Expeditioners, Filmmakers and Producers Kiana, Kourtez and Noah, the Expeditioners, were all students in the Palm Beach County school district during the expedition. Kiana has a deep interest in spreading conservation messages, especially through her music. This journey helped her to

realize a true connection with her local environment – something that had been missing from her experience in school.

Kourtez is a hard-charging explorer who truly learned what it takes to live “expedition style” during this journey. He continues to inspire his peers to follow his lead into the wild while he navigates high school. Noah’s interest in the environment was solidified during his immersion in nature. So much so that he now wants to pursue a career in science communication.

Alex Freeze, Expedition Leader, is a science educator, communicator, conservation photographer, and sixth generation Floridian. When she is not inspiring conservationists in the classroom in Blacksburg, VA, she is plotting her next adventure in the wildlands of Florida, the places she loves the most.

Neil Losin, co-owner of Day’s Edge Productions, realized his passion for telling science and conservation stories while on his path toward earning a PhD in UCLA’s Department of Ecology and Biology in 2012. Since then, he and Day’s Edge co-owner Nate Dappen and their growing production team have been creating stunning science-based visual stories all over the world.

Benji Studt, Executive Producer, is a conservation photographer, scientist and science communicator leading the outreach team at Palm Beach County Environmental Resources Management. In his time away from “work,” he, his wife, and their fur-babies are trying to find and explore the most beautiful wild places in the US.

Sergio Piedra, Executive Producer, is the Director of Community Engagement and Advocacy at Discover the Palm Beaches, Palm Beach County’s official tourism entity. His passion for the outdoors is now more integral than ever since Discover leans on Sergio to help build the eco-tourism brand into Discover’s marketing approach. Hidden Wild is acting as the springboard for this effort!

[You can watch a preview of Hidden Wild here.](#)

[Register for the ZOOM meeting here!](#)

PROTECTING THE AGRICULTURAL RESERVE IN PALM BEACH COUNTY

by Drew Martin



On Monday, June 29, the Palm Beach County's Board of County Commissioners voted on whether to breach the Comprehensive Plan for the Agricultural Reserve by permitting aggressive development that will violate the purpose of the Agriculture Reserve as an area of open space, agriculture, and wetlands. The commission denied one request and postponed for 60 days the other two requests. We urge you to contact commissioners and ask that no significant changes be made to the Agricultural Reserve.

Twenty years ago, the voters spent 100 million to purchase land to be preserved for agriculture. One of the arguments being used now is opening up the Agricultural Reserve to low income housing. There already are available affordable housing units in the Agricultural Reserve that have never been used. It would not make sense to violate the purpose of the Agricultural Reserve, which is to promote agriculture and open space, by adding additional affordable housing while currently available units go unused.

How has the county preserved agriculture and open space? This is done by requiring a portion of the Agricultural Reserve to be set aside through the establishment of Conservation Easements. In order to build on the remaining land, a developer must purchase or own preserved land or the preservation rights on existing preserved land. This prevents more than the allotted 40 percent of

development land being used for development. The current proposals seek to undermine the existing preservation components by either reducing or eliminating land protection requirements. The Agricultural Reserve is ideally suited for agriculture and should not be constantly developed, violating its intended purpose. Please contact your Palm Beach County Commissioners and ask them to vote down these developer-initiated proposals.

In addition, the Lake Worth Drainage District has voted to sell its right of way properties to GL Homes, which has sought to increase the number and density of developments, undermining the Agricultural Reserve. Instead, we need agriculture to provide affordable and healthy food. Today, healthy food and locally grown food is ever more important and the Agricultural Reserve plays an important role in providing local agriculture and local jobs.

Please let existing commissioners and future commissioners know that it is important to you to preserve the Agricultural Reserve as it is today.

Please contact [all commissioners simultaneously here](#).

Or you can [find their individual email addresses here](#) and contact them.

Plant continued from page 2

First: How to distinguish between native vs. non-native firebush. The native firebush has red-orange flowers and hairy leaves in groups of 3. The non-native (*Hamelia patens* var. *glabra*) has yellow-orange flowers, and non-hairy (glabrous) leaves in groups of 4.

Second: Does it matter? There are two issues in play:

1. Hybridization.

Roger Hammer notes that "Non-native *Hamelia patens* var. *glabra* readily escapes from seed around cultivated specimens and may contaminate the gene pool of Florida's native Firebush through hybridization..." Further, according to the Okeechobee County Extension Office "as non-native imports become more popular in local landscapes, they will interbreed with our native forms and alter the natural populations of Firebushes. No one is certain if the resulting hybrids will make it difficult for native Firebush populations to survive, and the wildlife that depends on them may also be affected by a loss of the native genetic makeup of [Florida's Firebush](#)." This brings up issue #2.

2. Specialization.

Much of the research on specialization focuses on insect herbivore specialists; that is, insects that have evolved together with specific plants over thousands of generations. The insects have developed adaptations so that they are able to eat those specific plants, despite the defense mechanisms which the plant has developed to protect itself. The non-native plant, since it did not co-evolve with the local fauna, does not contribute to the insect menu, nor to the menus of myriad insectivores, including birds! In other words, it provides significantly fewer ecosystem services.

So, yes – it does matter! If you shop for your firebush at a big-box store, you may be told that you are buying native firebush when it is not, or the plant may even be labeled as native when it is not, so check carefully for the red-orange flowers and/or hairy leaves in groups of 3. Better still, buy your firebush at a native plant nursery!

June Challenge Wraps Up



Photo: Black-necked Stilt not happy with completely innocent Fulvous Ducks.
Photo taken in flooded Ag Field off of Browns Farm Rd. on June 24 ©Vicki Rogerson

Congratulations to our Audubon Everglades volunteers and members who participated and placed in the 2021 June Challenge! Great job, Vicki Rogerson, Paula Gatrell, and Gael Silverblatt!

Florida results:

- 1st Tim Hardin, Alachua County, 127
- 2nd Sam Mitcham, Orange County, 123
- 3rd Tie: Ileana Stokes and Steve Stokes, Manatee County, 122 (+6 non-ABA)
- 4th Tie: Jason Chen and Dylan Hasemann, Alachua County, 122
- 5th Chris Cattau, Alachua County, 120
- 6th Tina Greenberg, Alachua County, 119
- 7th Kathy Doddridge, Manatee County, 116 (+3 non-ABA)
- 8th Xiao Hu, Alachua County, 116
- 9th Vicki Rogerson, Palm Beach County, 114 (+1 non-ABA)
- 10th Anne Casella, Alachua County, 114

Palm Beach County results:

- Vicki Rogerson, 115 (114/1)
- Paula Gatrell, 103 (101/2)
- Gael Silverblatt, 90 (90/0)

The June Challenge is a friendly competition designed to keep us birding through the summer heat while non-birders retreat indoors and miss all the fun. The aim of the competition is for each individual contestant to see as many species as possible within the boundaries of his or her county between June 1 and June 30.

Becky Enneis of Alachua County originated the June challenge in 2004. Palm Beach County has been participating for many years. If you're interested in learning more or would like to join next year's June Challenge, please contact Vicki Rogerson at Education@auduboneverglades.org.

AE PHOTOGRAPHY GROUP REGISTRATION FOR NEXT SEASON

by Mary Young



Photo: Sandhill Crane colt just emerged from mud ©Mary Young

Although the Audubon Everglades Photography Group (AEPG) wrapped up this season in June, we are in the process of scheduling events for our 2021-22 season that will begin in September.

If you are an AE "Friends" member and would like to register now for next season's Photography Group, please email: aepgregister@auduboneverglades.org and provide your name, email address and phone number. Registration includes participation in presentations, workshops, roundtable discussions and field trips (when AE deems it safe) as well as the ability to submit images to the Photo Critique sessions and to post on our AEPG Facebook page.

To visit our Photography page, [click here](#).

To visit our AEPG Facebook page, [click here](#).

Membership in "Friends" of Audubon Everglades is required to be part of AE Photography Group. To join "Friends" of Audubon Everglades, [please click here](#).

Join Friends of Audubon Everglades