



The Skimmer

Southeast Volusia Audubon Society, Inc.

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January, 2007

Prez Sez

IT WAS ORIGINALLY CALLED Hammock Creek, but now it is called Restoration. What is it restoring? It will restore a pristine part of Florida about 3.5 miles west of Edgewater into an enclave of 20,000 residents, nearly doubling the size of the city. It is not only an environmental disaster but also another example of urban sprawl which will tie up traffic on CR-442 and complicate life for people living in Florida Shores. Imagine the line of people trying to get into Edgewater for work or shopping.

Even if it were not for the environmental impact, a pragmatic approach to this development still shouts against it. What will it do for me? Developers and city managers say that it will increase the tax base and provide better services. Well, Edgewater has been growing ever since I moved here in 1996. My taxes still keep going up. We have been in water restrictions since shortly after we moved here. The city put electronic meters in the recycled water systems and will be charging by consumption. Our schools are still complexes of temporary buildings. We built a new high school in NSB that will be maxed out in no time.

An article in the Daytona Beach News Journal a couple of years ago predicted that Edgewater would be the size of Daytona Beach by 2020. So why did we move to Edgewater? If I wanted to live in Daytona Beach, why wouldn't I have moved there in the first place, rather than move to the nice quiet Edgewater and wait 20 years for it to grow up?

The Florida Supreme Court ruled Florida Hometown Democracy's proposed constitutional amendment met the legal requirement to go forward. Now it has to get 542,000 more petition signatures to put it on the ballot in 2008. If you believe that we need to get our growth back in our hands, go to the website www.floridahometowndemocracy.com and check it out. Let's keep some of pristine Florida in our midst.

—Don

There are no passengers on Spaceship Earth. We are all crew.

—Marshall McLuhan, 1964

January's Speaker

Bob Montanaro

JANUARY'S SPEAKER WILL BE Bob Montanaro addressing the subject Ospreys of Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge: An Exploration into the Life of the Fish Hawk. Through photography, it follows the nesting attempt by a pair of Ospreys at the nation's first National Wildlife Refuge throughout the 2006 nesting season. The Osprey, or Fish Hawk, is one of the largest birds of prey in North America with fish making up most of its diet. The Osprey has a global presence, being found on almost every continent except for Antarctica, and is a common sight not only in the Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge but also throughout Florida. Over 100 days were spent at the Refuge with almost 30,000 photographs being taken to chronicle the lives of the Ospreys.

The program covers not only the Osprey nesting attempt but also shows encounters with other wildlife in the Refuge---everything from River Otters and a family of Pileated Woodpeckers to fighting Red-Shouldered Hawks! For more information, visit <http://www.ospreywatch.org/>.

Bob holds a B.A. in History from the University of Central Florida and an M.A. in U.S. History from Florida State University.

Bob Montanaro is a long-time volunteer at both Pelican Island and Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuges and is currently the office manager for the Pelican Island Audubon Society. He has been interested in photography and wildlife, especially the osprey all his life.

—Ken Gunn



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Conservation Notes



TALKING SOLAR TO LEGISLATORS Some 73 citizens signed up to address our eleven members of the Volusia County Legislative Delegation on Dec. 14 in the DeLand County Council chambers. The event was planned as a listening session for legislators to hear their constituents' concerns.

Each member of the public was allowed three minutes speaking time and most everyone adhered to it. Speakers covered a wide variety of issues, with property taxes getting the most comments. Several city and county officials, including Morgan Gilreath, Volusia County Tax Assessor, were critical of the current system of property taxes, but nobody thought a remedy would be easy or popular.

Among speakers in the morning session, I was the only one talking about an energy need. In three minutes, I tried to make these points about solar energy:

- * The 2006 Florida Energy Act contained several modest, but necessary first steps toward supporting solar power, thanks to Representative Dorothy Hukill.
- * The Florida DEP told me on Dec. 11 that 934 applications for solar rebates had been received, mostly for solar thermal hot water systems.
- * Only 10 or 12 applications were recorded for solar PV systems to generate electricity. DEP surmised from conversations with applicants that home and business owners were reluctant to commit investments in solar PV without ironclad guarantees that solar PV rebates were funded for the next fiscal year. DEP could not provide that guarantee.
- * Florida trails other states and nations in using free sunshine to generate electricity. We are playing catch-up and need to take bold steps, rather than nibble at the problem. I suggested these actions:
 - ✓ Require net metering for grid-tied PV systems. This can be a major attraction of solar PV. Net metering means that the building owner pays for the net of kWh used, minus the kWh produced by the building's system. In effect the utility buys power at retail, which they strongly oppose. To make net metering more palatable to investor-owned utilities, Florida could offer tax credits for the difference between wholesale and retail cost of power bought from a system owner.
 - ✓ Increase funding for solar rebates to \$100 million, spread over the life of the Energy Act, to ensure that solar PV investors can count on future rebates. Consider a Public Benefits Fund as a way to pay for it.

- ✓ Require all new housing developments to incorporate "green building" design with solar power.

I stated that, for example, Florida lags way behind Japan, Germany and New Jersey in solar power development, but we have much better sunshine than any of those places.

Representative Hukill thanked me for my efforts and indicated that her office is preparing energy legislation for the upcoming session.

Did you know that Japan no longer subsidizes solar PV because it costs no more than electricity from the grid? Yet PV remains extremely popular in Japan. The catch is that Japanese electric rates are 21 cents per kWh, about double average US rates. Scientists and economists predict that economies of scale, new technology and competition in 20 years will drive down PV prices in the US to levels competitive with our generously subsidized fossil fuel power.

Recent climate and weather events lend more urgency to the need for switching to clean renewable energy, with solar offering by far the greatest opportunity for Florida.

Climatologists report that 2006 is likely the fifth or sixth warmest year on record. Other scientists now predict that future sea level rise could be significantly higher from greenhouse gas emissions than predicted earlier. This is the warmest year in Britain since records began in 1659. The Alps are the warmest they have been in 1,300 years and ski resorts are suffering. Europe has recorded its warmest autumn in 500 years. Four years of unprecedented drought in Australia has caused a farmer suicide every four days as their livelihoods and assets have withered away. Here in the US, a blistering drought in the Midwest led to raging forest fires. Some 9.5 million acres burned, the worst year on record.

Meanwhile we hear that new coal and nuclear plants are planned for Florida. Coal plants, in addition to killing people with pollution, are major greenhouse gas emitters. Nuclear plants are net greenhouse gas emitters for at least 18 to 20 years after construction starts. Eight or ten years of construction require much fossil fuel energy. Then it takes 10 or 12 years of electricity production to offset all the fossil fuel energy used in plant construction plus mining the uranium fuel, shipping it and processing it into fuel rods. That energy debt does not include the energy to dismantle a worn out, radioactive plant. More energy is required to take care of the used fuel rods that will be dangerous for half a million years. Whew! I cannot understand why rational people would ever build another nuclear plant, even if a catastrophic accident were not possible. Of course none would be built in the US without enormous government subsidies, including catastrophic liability insurance.

Conservation Notes

I was interested to learn that someone else says global 'heating'. James Lovelock, the distinguished British scientist who hypothesized that the earth acts like a living organism named Gaia, talks about global heating. He says 'warming' is far too mild a term.

Lovelock is a pessimist who thinks global heating has already become irreversible and will make much of the planet uninhabitable and trim earth's population down to some 500 million. I don't agree. We cannot lose hope, and we must keep trying.

As soon as Rep. Hukill's office has filed a new energy bill, I will alert many of you by e-mail, so that we can support it.

—Lee Bidgood

January Field Trip

Merritt Island

THIS IS ONE OF my favorite field trips, it ranks right up there with the spring trip to the Alligator Farm in St. Augustine. Usually, although not always, there are a lot of birds on the 130, 000 + acreage. Of course, our group doesn't traverse the whole refuge. We generally confine our birding to the seven mile Black Point Wildlife Drive, hopping in and out of our pooled cars along the way. I haul my camera gear along and most of the time I'm able to set up tripod and long lens while the rest of the group peers through spotting scopes and binoculars at the sea of birds before us. Some years the number of birds is mind boggling and some years there are fewer, but it's always a healthy breezy lovely Florida outdoor winter experience. For the photogs among us, there are many, many "Kodak moments."

Weather permitting—as you know, it does get chilly sometimes here in the Sunshine State—we finish up with a picnic at the nearby Visitors' Center. Some members and guests prefer to dine indoors and take off for Titusville (only minutes away) or my favorite place Cocoa Village (a little farther down US-1) where there are plenty of good eateries.

So, plan on coming along. Gail & Richard (and a few other excellent birder-members) do a great job of identifying species among the many birds we see. If you're not a member—perhaps you've picked this *Skimmer* up somewhere in town—you're welcome to come along. These field trips are free and open to all. No birding experience necessary and this trip requires very little walking.

Join us for a morning outing.

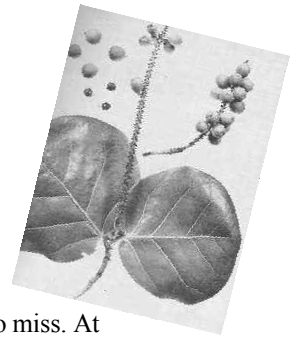
—Gil Miller

Have you read this before? This article appeared in the December Skimmer. That trip was relocated because of the shuttle lift-off. Since we're going to Merritt in January, I dusted this off and stuck it in...getting lazy in my dotage. G.M.

Native & Nice

Sea grape

THE SEA GRAPE (*Coccoloba uvifers*) is one of the most familiar native plants in our area. It's distinctive leaves with their thick, leathery texture and broad, rounded shape are hard to miss. At maturity, the leaves are a dark sea green with reddish veins. Each spring, sea grapes shed their tough, dry leaves which are soon replaced with beautiful mahogany-tinted new growth. Long, graceful white flower spikes, that are fragrant and nectar-rich, follow a little later.



Sea grapes are very popular on beachside, where they withstand direct hits from salt spray and thrive in poor, sandy soil—even growing in sand dunes. They prefer full sun. Harsh beach conditions restrict sea grapes to low, dense shrubs. In a friendlier environment and with a little pruning, they will grow into trees with broad, rounded crowns. Sea grapes also make an excellent hedge.

It is the fruit of the sea grape that gives it its name. In late summer, large clusters of "grapes" appear, changing from pale green to purple. Many people claim that they can be used in the same way as real grapes to make jams, jellies, and wine, and the blossoms may be useful in honey production. I'm content to leave the fruit as a food source for wildlife.

To see an effective display of massed sea grapes, visit Buena Vista Park at the southwest corner of the North Causeway bridge.

—Donnadine Miller

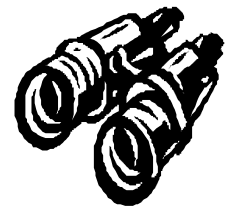
From The Field

December Field Trip

THE PLANNED TRIP to Merritt Island was rescheduled to The Viera Wetlands due to the Shuttle launch. Nevertheless, twelve members enjoyed a beautiful morning at Viera and there were plenty of waterfowl present. Highlights include the Masked Duck – a life bird for several members and watching a Peregrine Falcon catch, pluck and have a snack on the dike. There were numerous Blue & Green-winged Teal along with Ring-necked & Mottled Duck. Also had good looks at Hooded Merganser, Northern Harrier, Sandhill Cranes and the usual Herons, Coots and Moorhens.

Our January 6th field will be to Merritt Island and there should be plenty of waterfowl there also.

—Dick & Gail Domroski



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Meetings

Meetings are held the 1st Wednesdays
Oct. thru March

Edgewater Library 103 Indian River Blvd. 7: P.M.
Smoke-free environment. Refreshments are served.
Plenty of parking. Public welcome.

Wed., January 3 - 7 P.M.

Speaker: **Bob Montanaro**

"Ospreys of Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge"

Programs & Field trips subject to change.

Field Trips

Field trips begin at 8:00 A.M. unless otherwise noted. Meet in the Market Square parking lot Edgewater, Ridgewood Ave. & 442, between Dunkin Donuts & Chik-Fil-A.

Bring lunch & drinks. Don't forget bug-spray!

Sat. Jan. 6 - Merritt Island

Questions? Contact Gail Domroski 428-0447

Audubon members and guests are all welcome.