

The eSkimmer

Southeast Volusia Audubon Society, Inc. Summer Email Issue Vol. II - No. 4 August, 2007

The Southeast Volusia Audubon Society promotes the protection of birds, other wildlife and their habitat through education and activism.

Prez Sez

Leigh Lake

The water from Leigh Lake flows into String Lake, which in turn flows into Jenny Lake like strings in a pearl necklace around the neck of the Teton Mountains. The volunteers who work at the Leigh Lake patrol cabin sign off at night as the Jewel of the Tetons. If that is not reason enough to make you want to go there, I don't know what is.

So on one of my back-country patrol days a couple of weeks ago, I decided to go there. It is a short one-mile hike through Ponderosa Pines to the end of String Lake and a tenth of a mile on a spur trail to get to the Leigh Lake overlook. The reward was a spectacular view of a hidden lake carved by glaciers about 15000 years ago, and surrounded by Ponderosa Pines and Douglas Fir. A trail winds counterclockwise about three-fourths of the way around the lake. I followed it and about 2 ½ miles in I arrived at some back-country campsites where people were camped and refreshing themselves to beat the 90 degree temperatures by swimming in the lake. They told me of a Black bear that had been there a half hour earlier. It was thrashing logs looking for insects and grubs and then refreshed itself by swimming not 70 yards from the campers. It then left the area without paying much attention to the campers. I continued on for another half mile and then turned back since I had a schedule to keep. I never saw the bear, but who knows whether or not it saw me.

It turns out that the park has some river patrol canoes cached on the lake and one of them is available for checkout by



Mt. Moran

Don Picard

park staff. On Sunday, Maureen and I checked it out for the day. After a half hour drive and a half hour hike, we were on the lake by 9 am. I could see the current going to the southwest where the lake narrows and the waters crash over a stretch of large rocks on the way into String Lake. I decided on a counterclockwise paddle around the perimeter so we would not be fighting the current.

If you want to define the term "idyllic", imagine you are in a canoe on a 2 ½ mile by 2 mile lake with a warm morning sun. There is no breeze to break the glassiness of the water, and you are alone on the lake. The only sounds are of your paddles in the water and the birds singing and chirping in the trees and along the bank. There were lots of yellow warblers, yellow-rumped warblers, crossbills, spotted sandpipers, thrushes, red-shafted flickers, robins, and a family of common mergansers sitting on a big rock in the middle of the lake.

The water was so clear, we could see how far the glacier advanced by the pile of large round cobbles that signaled the end of its advance. We could see where it ground the rocks into beach sand on its North and East shores. And the erratics, boulders the size of cars and even houses, which the glacier dropped as it retreated.

Shortly, there were a lot of canoers and kayakers in the lake. They paddled upstream in String Lake and portaged the tenth mile spur to the Leigh Lake overlook, and put in for their adventure.

As we reached the West end of the lake, we saw the water flowing into it from Leigh Canyon and Paintbrush Canyon. We got into the current and had an easy ride back to our starting point.

My advice to you: Y'all come. But SSSSH! Don't tell too many people about it.

—Don

Meetings

Meetings are held the first Wed. of each month

Oct. thru March at 7 P.M.

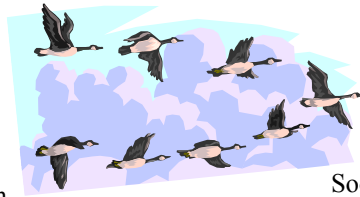
Next meeting is October 3, 2007

*A society grows great when old men
plant trees whose shade they know they
shall never sit in.*

— Greek Proverb

Wandering Members

Birding the Great Plains



Near the end of June I drove from Houston north to Canada, crossing into Saskatchewan at Portal, North Dakota. Since I had no deadlines I decided to take my time. This was hard and required overcoming almost 50 years of training and practice.

I did not get away from Houston until well into the afternoon on June 19. As a result, I only went as far as Paul's Valley that day – barely over the border into Oklahoma. I traveled just after the first of the heavy rains and flooding that struck North Texas this summer. Everything was still soggy and the Red River looked like a river for the first time in my memory. We had severe thunderstorms all that night too.

The next morning, as I was navigating around deep mud puddles, I decided my best bet for a slow trip was to stay off the freeway. Consequently, I went west from Paul's Valley until I was clear of Oklahoma City, then north, birding along the way.

The first of several real treats happened within 5 miles of Paul's Valley. I spotted a little bird sitting on the power line and kept my eye on it as I got closer. Just as I passed I realized there were actually two birds close together. I stopped and went back for a better look. I discovered there were actually 3 very tiny Scissor-tailed Flycatcher babies, huddled together for warmth, covering no more than 3 inches of the wire. Wow!

Shortly before noon, I reached the Salt Plains, an area that I hadn't even been aware of. I spent five hours there and could have spent as many days. I saw everything from White-faced Ibis and White Pelicans to Lark Sparrows and White-breasted Nuthatches. I also observed a Painted Bunting singing happily in the very top of a pine tree. When I called home that evening, I told Beth that I had found the Merritt Island of the Plains.

I stopped for the night at Great Bend, Kansas, barely covering one state in the whole day. But the bird count for the day was 55 species.

Shortly after starting out the next morning, I saw a sign which said Kirwin National Wildlife Refuge 4 miles east. So I went east. There was much more open land and fewer trees than at Salt Plains but every tree seemed to have one or more birds in it. I don't know how many Red-headed Woodpeckers and Northern Orioles I saw, as I am sure that I saw several more than once, but it was at least 12 of the redheads and from 7 to 20 orioles. I also saw an Eastern Kingbird and a Western Kingbird cooperate to thoroughly beat up and drive off a Magpie. When I returned an hour later, they were on joint guard duty, sitting on posts about 10 feet apart, in case he came back.

Again, I spent 3 hours and could have spent as many days. That day I made it through two states and stopped at Winning, SD for the night. Count for the day was 62 species.

Early the next morning I stopped in a misty river valley to

look at a raptor. Once stopped, I noticed a Turkey hen worrying about three little puffballs, all on a dead branch about 8 feet off the ground and only 50 yards away. The hen was very concerned about me stopping so near them, but the puffballs weren't for moving until the sun got warmer, so all stayed put.

Soon thereafter, I came upon a Pheasant hen trying to get 15 – 20 fairly independent chicks off the road. Finally almost all of them made it and I started ahead. At that point they all took flight as if that was the first time they noticed the car. I birded at Fort Pierre, La Framboise Island, where Lewis and Clark first met the Sioux, Oneida wetlands and Long Lake National Wildlife Refuge. The island was terrific warbler and woodpecker territory. The wetlands had family after new family of all kinds of waterfowl. Long Lake is home of more Western Grebes than I knew existed. I did see some synchronized swimming but was too late in the year to see the lengthy courtship displays. Here, I also caught up with a pair of Willets trying to herd a very stubborn baby off the road – spent five minutes taking in the show until they finally literally pushed him into the grass.

All day, I was treated to the sight of families of Common Grackles perched side by side on fences. The 3 – 4 babies were conspicuous with their shiny new black feathers glistening in the sun. They would have both their bills and their tails pointed straight up, each thereby forming a near perfect "U". At Fort Pierre, I spent several minutes watching a mother Robin attempting to teach a completely uninterested baby how to catch a worm. All in all, it was a great day for baby birds.

Again I only made it through one state, stopping at Bismarck, ND for the night. Total count was 66 species.

The next day I birded Audubon National Wildlife Refuge for about 5 hours. This is the one place that I always try to stop on my way north and it didn't disappoint this time either. As well as all the birds, I was treated to a close look at a very new fawn, probably out with his mother for the first time. When I showed up, the doe immediately bounded into the bushes and, I assume, proceeded to call the fawn. The baby was afraid to jump the tall grass at the edge of the road, however, so stood uncomfortably in the middle of the road. After several minutes, he finally got it together and in three or four quick leaps was over the grass, into the ditch and in the cover of the trees.

I went on to Des Lacs National Wildlife Refuge and after birding there for a short time went on to the border. Count for the day was 67 species.

My totals for the trip were 123 species of which 12 were lifers for me. I should take my time more often.

—Ken Gunn

Worth Reading

Editor's Choice

The Beauty of the Beastly by: Natalie Angier

Paperback: 278 pages **Publisher:** Mariner Books
Language: English **ISBN-:** 0395791472

Hardback ISBN-: 0395718163 Houghton Mifflin

Wandering Members

The Galapagos Islands

Donnadine and I spent eleven days in Ecuador this past month the highlight of the trip being the four days we spent aboard Archipell II, with thirteen fellow passengers, cruising the waters surrounding the fifty volcanic islands that form the Galapagos Archipelago.

From the ship via dinghies, we visited one, sometimes two a day of the islands that are part of the Galapagos National Park system (90% of the Galapagos Islands are controlled by the National Park Service). The Park Service is insistent that nothing be transferred from one island to the next, not even the tiniest grain of volcanic grit, so our shoes had to be deposited in a box on the ship-board landing deck to be thoroughly washed before being used again. This became part of our daily routine and we were glad to have two pair of shoes else we'd have to go bare-foot while on board our home at sea.

Our guide would announce beforehand whether the landing was to be "wet" or "dry" (a total misnomer—no landing was 100% "dry"). "Wet" landings were really wet. We headed for a beach and before the dinghy reached the sand, we'd be knee deep in the surf holding cameras aloft and laughing onto the island. "Dry" landings got us to slippery volcanic rock ledges and with the aid of an arm from our guide, Diego and a push from our dinghy Captain Christian or Gustavo, we clambered ashore. By the second day, we were all rugged veterans ready for anything.

The islands are awe inspiring, being like nothing we'd ever seen before. Some were huge mountainous volcanos looming gray and ominously over the seascape, yet quietly majestic and in a way, comforting. Others were flat barren rocky plains where the vegetation was sparse and the trees were small bent skeletal affairs that had devised a way of surviving in the environment of endless wind and baking sun.



"Dry" Landing

Gil Miller

Of course, the attraction to the islands is the myriad lifestyles of the creatures that have evolved under very demanding conditions. The same flora and fauna that so bemused Charles Darwin on his famous visit there on the HMS Beagle in 1835 still abound, now doggedly protected by the National Park Service of Ecuador. Delineations where visitors are allowed to tread are plainly staked out and the endemic animals who are residents go on about their daily lives nearly oblivious to the camera-clicking oohing and ahing tourists just a few feet from them.

I oohed, ahhed and clicked with all the rest. Donnadine quietly peered through her binoculars or just stood and reflected on what lay before her. Sometimes I broke her reverie to ask her to hold a filter or pull another lens from the camera bag snugged on my back. Frequently I got lost in another time when I was peering through my view finder. I use a Canon digital SLR so peering through the viewfinder is the only way I can compose an image. Looking through the tiny magic window while trying to get the "right shot", I found myself lingering at the portal long after the shutter snapped. I was in a magic kingdom millions of years old. The little window shut out the distractions of a 21st century tour

and allowed me to be a part of another time. I peered through that little window a lot. I took over 800 digital images which I'm working into several slide shows. Galapagos (not yet finished) will be show 2, linked in next issue.

The first slideshow, (which includes nothing I've just talked about), Adventure in Ecuador Pt. 1 is finished and can be seen by clicking on the following link:

<http://www.photodex.com/sharing/viewalbum.html?alb=131603>

Hints:

- 1) Turn on your sound.
- 2) Click on the show icon and as it starts to load right click and choose "Full Screen" from the drop-down menu. That's it.

Remember to turn off your screen saver.

—Gil Miller

Audubon News

Southeastern Election Region Results

The regular election by Audubon chapters in the Southeastern Election Region to select a nominee for the position on the National Audubon Board of Directors is complete. The ballots were counted Monday, July 2, and the nominees have been contacted.

Don McKee is the nominee.

39 chapters voted out of 65 chapters in the region (60%)

57 ballots were cast out of a possible 104 (55%)

Don McKee's name will be placed on the slate of nominees to the Board that is voted upon at the Annual Meeting of Members in January 2008.

"As far as I can judge of myself I worked to the utmost during the voyage from the mere pleasure of investigation, and from my strong desire to add a few facts to the great mass of facts in natural science."

— Charles Darwin

Commenting on his voyage to the Galapagos Islands on the H.M.S. Beagle

Please forward this  to friends.

Links

Birds as Barometers/Indicators

<http://www.birdlife.org/action/science/sowb/6.html>

Planet Ark

<http://www.planetark.com/>

Your Florida Backyard

<http://www.nsis.org/index.html>

Florida Native Plants

<http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/guide/invplant.html>

Central Florida Bird Watchers

<http://www.cfbw.com/index.html>

Florida Hotspots

<http://www.camacdonald.com/birding/usflorida.htm>

Audubon (National)

<http://www.audubon.org/>

Audubon of Florida

www.audubonofflorida.org

Native & Nice

Portulaca pilosa

Several years ago when I first became interested in Florida's native plants, I purchased some pink purslane (*Portulaca pilosa*) to use as a low-growing ground cover. Had I been a little more patient, I would have discovered any number of volunteer clumps popping up in my bed and lawn alike.



More familiar is the common purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*), sometimes called pigweed, which originated in India and the Middle East. In soups and salads, its fleshy leaves are a good source of Omega-3 fatty acids, a well-documented dietary source for lowering cholesterol and boosting the immune system, among other benefits. Even before moving to Florida, I enjoyed the profusion of yellow, orange, and hot pink blossoms of *Portulaca grandiflora*, better known as moss rose. They bloomed continuously throughout the summer and were very forgiving of gardeners who sometimes forgot to water.

But, I digress...our native pink purslane, nicknamed Kiss-Me-Quick, is much smaller than its cousins, growing to less than 6 inches tall. The clumps of short, stubby "leaves" are covered liberally with diminutive raspberry pink flowers no larger than a peppercorn from late spring into early fall. Pink purslane propagates by seed and by spreading clump size, and it thrives in dry, sandy soils. They are so tolerant of poor conditions, that they are known to squeeze through the cracks of a sidewalk. If pink purslane wasn't so delightful, it might be considered invasive.

Added to pink purslane's fine qualities is the fact that it attracts bees and butterflies.

—Donnadine Miller

Officers & Chairs



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Publicity: Vacant		
Ways & Means: Vacant		
Education/Outreach: Vacant		
Hospitality: Vacant		

We need YOU to fill one of these vacant spaces!

New Members

We welcome Elizabeth Savage, Cheryl Lussier, Jessie Baker, Cheryl Durley, Richard Corner.

Our Email Address

the.skimmer@yahoo.com

If you'd like to have The eSkimmer emailed monthly, contact us at the above address. Type Subscribe in the subject line.

Our Website

<http://thewanderers.stewart.net/sevas/sevas.htm>