



# The Limpkin Call

The newsletter of the Oklawaha Valley Audubon Society, a chapter of Audubon Florida and the National Audubon Society and a not-for-profit organization.

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March - April 2020

Number 5

## President's Column

Spring will soon be in the air, and that means so will the birds....

As Springtime temperatures soon reach Florida, our landscape changes, and with the changing landscape comes a beautiful array of flying visitors. March and April are great months for bird watching, whether it's at a known watching site, or in your own backyard. You can help by planting native plants that offer birds different heights, a variety of foods, and options for shelter — in turn, you'll welcome a higher number of species to your yard. Birds rely on three aspects to survive: food, habitat, and water. Offering each of these aspects will invite birds into your yard for spectacular bird watching.

Happy Birdwatching!

At our Annual Meeting Sunday, March 1, 2020, we will have Dr. Steven Noll, a co-author of *Ditch of Dreams*, as our speaker for this OVAS event (see page 2). Our annual meeting and elections for the Board will be held before his talk, with a social of wine, cheese, and crackers for a transition. We are not having a potluck luncheon this year, but we encourage you to bring cheese and crackers to share (wine and non-alcoholic drinks will be provided). We will need help to set up and to staff tables, pour wine, etc. If you can help, please show up at 11:30.

We truly are in need of Board Members. We currently have 4 board members and need 5 for a quorum. That is a minimum for us to continue our regular business for the chapter. We have had several Board Members leave us due to personal reasons, no longer have time or desire, and just life in general no longer permits them to be on the Board; the OVAS property situation also has driven some off (see page 8). If we cannot find more members to step forward to be a part of the Board, the chapter will fold. We can put the chapter on hiatus for a year's time or we will need to give National Audubon Society a 60-day notification that we will be dissolving.

Oklawaha Valley Audubon Society is one of the oldest Audubon Chapters in the state. The first documented attempt at a bird club in Lake County was in April 1951. It is now February 2020; 68 years and 10 months later we are still going. The group's name officially became the Lake County Audubon Society on January 11, 1952. On November 30, 1965 the name was changed to the Mt. Dora Audubon Society. It was incorporated as a Florida nonprofit organization on March 29, 1966. May 20, 1968 the name was changed to Oklawaha Valley Audubon Society because the membership had extended beyond Lake County lines. Please help us continue the legacy of what our founding members stated purpose was "to have bird walks and water trips"

If you are interested in becoming a part of the OVAS Board please contact: Stacey Kelly at [s.heinemann2019@gmail.com](mailto:s.heinemann2019@gmail.com) before the slate is

presented at the meeting. We cherish and give many thanks for all our volunteers at OVAS. Without our volunteers we cannot continue to provide the wonderful programs and field trips that we offer to our members and the general public.

I would like send out a big Thank You to Clyde Stephens. Clyde has again planned an amazing annual overnight trip, which was sold out quickly. A phenomenal time had by all who attended. Clyde, thank you for all that you have done for OVAS.

July 2020 begins our new Fiscal Year. With this new FY (July 2020-July 2021) we will be instituting a new membership fee of \$20.00 per household. The increase in membership fee is to help with the ongoing operations fee for the chapter; ranging from General Liability Insurance, Board of Directors Insurance, Post Office Box, Website Hosting fees, Guest Speakers and Field Trip Guides fees.

I truly hope that moving forward, Oklawaha Valley Audubon Society will still be able to continue the mission of striving to see a world in which people and wildlife thrive. By protecting birds, wildlife, and the places they need throughout Lake County and the region; using science, advocacy, and conservation. Striving to see a world in which people and wildlife thrive.

Oh to be like a bird for one brief day... Fly away... Fly away... by A Peerless

Cheers,  
Stacey

## At A Glance: March – June 2020

### March

- 1 – Annual Meeting & Program: *Ditch of Dreams*
- 10 – Lunch on the Lawn: Stefancic home

### April

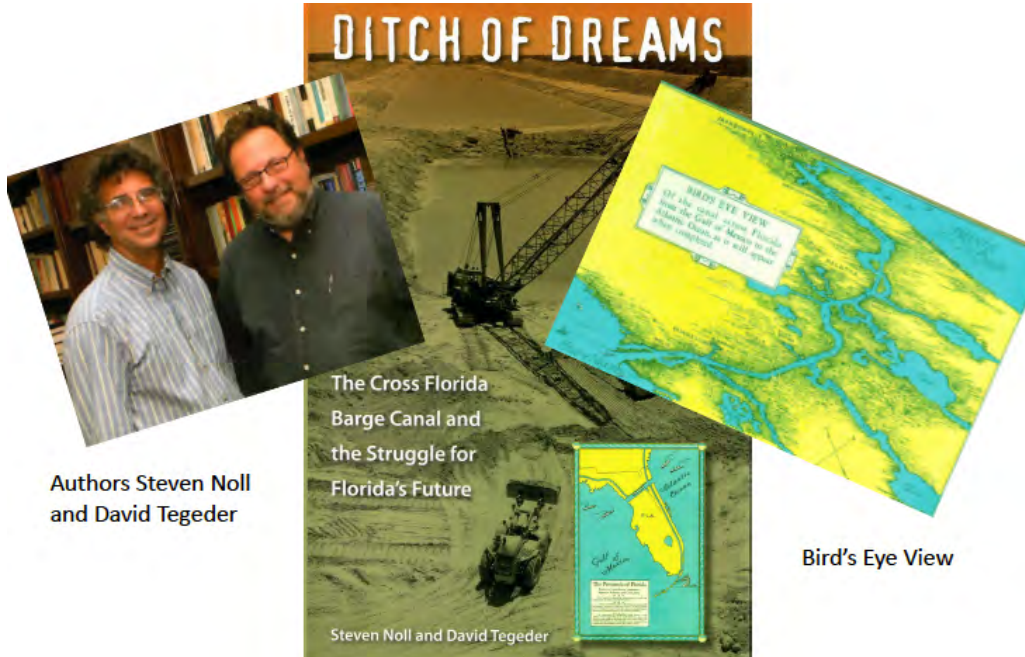
- 5 - Program: Lake Apopka North Shore
- 23 - Lunch on the Lawn: Sass home
- 29 - Field Trip: Tubing at Ichetucknee Springs

### May

- 3 - Program: The Moth Guy
- 5- Breakfast on the "Lawn": Green Mountain Ov'look

### June

- 7 - Program: Why Shorebirds Should Matter to You



Authors Steven Noll and David Tegeeder

Bird's Eye View

## The Oklawaha Valley Audubon Society invites you to our Annual Meeting, social, and Special Program

### *Ditch of Dreams* Sunday March 1, 2020

**12:30 p.m.** Oklawaha Valley Audubon Society members and guests will gather for our business meeting, including an election of officers and other board members. We then will transition to an exciting program by Steven Noll.

**1:30 p.m.** Mix and Mingle while you nibble and sip. Refreshments and a glass of wine included with your donation for Dr. Steven Noll's program.

### **2:00 p.m., Dr. Steven Noll, *Ditch of Dreams***

Dr. Steven Noll, a co-author of *Ditch of Dreams*, will be our speaker for this OVAS event at Trout Lake Nature Center. Dr. Noll is a professor at the University of Florida and a previous Florida Humanities Council speaker. Testifying persuasively to his ability to inform and entertain, his students rate him as a thumbs up, and say he is passionate about history, makes a ton of jokes, and is extremely informative. Dr. Noll will tell us the backstory story of the *Ditch of Dreams*, also known as the Cross Florida Barge Canal. He will recount the political intrigue, the economic interests, and the indomitable spirit of Marjorie Harris Carr, the woman who led the fight to stop the canal and the environmental damage it would have caused.

Cynthia Barnett, author of *Mirage*, wrote about *Ditch of Dreams*: "Offers timeless lessons about pork-barrel politics and the power of citizen-environmentalism. Most important, it reminds us that today's economic coup may well be tomorrow's environmental crisis."

Dr. Noll's subject is particularly relevant now; those voices from the past echo some of the same arguments we hear today for the proposed toll road connector to go from Tampa to Jacksonville and impacting some of Florida's remaining natural areas. This Audubon Chapter's name, Oklawaha Valley Audubon Society, was selected in part because those early members were intensely involved in the battle to "Save the Oklawaha River". Audubon still speaks up today to remind governments and citizens of the importance of natural areas, wetland and upland, for their environmental services.

**A \$10.00 donation is requested.** This entertaining and informative program is also a fund-raiser to support OVAS' operating costs (including speaker fees), The Festival of Flight and Flowers, and other non-profits such as Trout Lake Nature Center and Audubon Florida's Center for Birds of Prey. Dr. Noll's book will be available for purchase (\$20) and he will sign your copy.

## COMING EVENTS - Programs

All Programs are at 2:00 pm on the first Sunday of the month, September through June, at Trout Lake Nature Center (520 East Country Road 44), Eustis, unless otherwise noted. Arrive at 1:30 pm for socializing and snacks (you are welcome to bring something to share) and for a preview of upcoming fieldtrips and programs. We suggest a \$2 donation when you attend.

### A Story of the People, Partnerships, and Perseverance on Lake Apopka's North Shore Sunday, April 5, 2020 at 2:00 p.m.



The natural history of a place and its human history often intertwine. There is evidence that Native Americans used the body of water we now call Lake Apopka for 10,000 years. In the 1940's the lake drew tourists to

fish camps; the surrounding rich marsh soils drew people to clear and create farms providing food for a hungry nation during WW II. Those same "muck farms" created many of the problems still being dealt with today.

Gian Basili will tell the story of the many people who helped work through the challenges of the Lake Apopka project. There were Ag landowners, environmentalists, scientists, local governments, bass fishermen, agency staff, and many more who were involved in the work to acquire the "muck farms" and then create a plan known as the Lake Apopka Restoration Project. There were ups and downs along the way including sick alligators and a massive bird kill in the Winter of 1998; Gian Basili was involved in much of this process.

Gian no longer lives in this area, he works for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service out of Jacksonville, but he recently returned to this area for the Lake Apopka North Shore Birding Festival, and to a Lake Apopka which now boasts cleaner water and is an internationally known birding destination - all due to the hard work and problem solving of many people including Gian.

It is this human story, still ongoing today, along with some science and natural history, he will tell us during our April program.



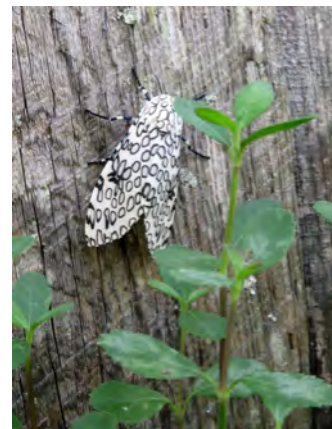
### The Moth Guy Sunday, May 3, 2020 at 2:00 p.m.

OVAS invites you to a program that will help you make your landscape more bird friendly by making it more moth friendly.

Taylor Jones evidently has been interested in Lepidoptera since he was a youngster: a search of the 'net finds a photo of him at a tender age with his butterfly net. As an adult, while living in Staten Island, New York, he brought that interest to life as he began raising giant silk moths, Saturniids. Earning him the nickname, The Moth Guy. Now living in Mt Dora, Taylor pursues his hobby, attracting butterflies and moths to his landscape, while earning a living as a political cartoonist.

At our program Taylor will share the facts of life for moths, particularly the giant silk moths: like the Regal, Luna, and lo to name a few. He'll offer some tips on how to attract them to our yards, and if the timing is right he'll bring some live caterpillars or pupae for our inspection. It's guaranteed to be an entertaining and informative afternoon.

Oh, and there are also rumors that he has some bird cartoons he might share with us.



## COMING EVENTS - Programs

### Why Shorebirds Should Matter to You Sunday, June 7, 2020 at 2:00 p.m.



You might be thinking, how can this program be relevant or of interest to me, I don't live on the coast. But this coastal bird and stewardship program is not just meant for birders on the beaches!

Florida is mostly coastline, and birds are using every inch of it. Even though we live in the middle of the state, we are just an hour and a half from the east coast and a couple hours from the west coast. Coastal birds, specifically shorebirds, use these beaches that all of us Floridians flock to (pun intended!) for vacations, day trips, etc. Plus, Florida is at risk of sea level rise, and these coastal birds will have to find other habitats to use. For example, a few years ago Least Terns were found either using or scoping out potential nesting habitat on gravel rooftops in Sanford and Deland. Terns can be sighted on our Central Florida lakes during the Winter as well. And most of us make at least one pilgrimage to the Beach during the year so knowing a little about shorebird etiquette will be useful. Even if we never see another shorebird, we can vicariously enjoy tales of shorebird rescue and knowing how they are safely living their lives at the beach. So join Holly Short, Project Manager for Audubon's Bird Monitoring and Stewardship Program for OVAS' June program.



### OVAS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Stacey Kelly, President**  
**vacant, 1st Vice President**  
**vacant, 2nd Vice President**  
**vacant, Treasurer**  
**vacant, Secretary**  
**Sherry Chester, Director-at-Large**  
**Judy Knizner, Director-at-Large**  
**Peg Lindsay, Director-at-Large**  
**vacant, Director-at-Large**  
**vacant, Director-at-Large**

## COMING EVENTS - Field Trips

**Field Trips are subject to change due to weather or other circumstances. Please contact the trip leader to confirm a space and for more information, including carpooling instructions. For most trips you will need outdoor shoes, insect repellent, sunscreen, a hat, raingear or jacket, binoculars (of course), water, and a snack or lunch. We suggest a donation of \$10/adult for each field trip for OVAS members and \$15/adult for non-members; children are free. Actual costs, such as entry fees, etc., are separate, and are noted in each write-up. Check our [website](#) for updated information and to register, and to view photos from recent field trips.**

**Lunch on the Lawn events are short, easy birding hikes led by Peg Lindsay and Bob Putman. Bring a brown bag lunch. If you are willing to volunteer your house and lawn, contact Peg at [pegcondor@embarqmail.com](mailto:pegcondor@embarqmail.com). If you don't have email, you can call 352-326-2045.**

Driving Directions for March 10 Lunch on the Lawn event at the Home of Joyce and Bill Stefancic, 14311 Hunters Trace Lane, Clermont:

Directions from Ferndale:

Go west on 561A to Sugarloaf Mountain Rd.

Turn right/north on Sugarloaf Mountain Rd.

Make the first left/west onto Hunters Trace Lane.

Stefancics is the 2nd house on the right, after the empty lot with the pond

Continued on the Next Page

### Call for Missing History

We are compiling OVAS's history and digitizing it for safekeeping. Remarkably, we have archived nearly all the annual brochures (since 1970) and newsletters (since 1984), but we are missing a few. If you still possess any of the following, please allow us to borrow them to be scanned. Contact Sherry Chester ([epperlychester@gmail.com](mailto:epperlychester@gmail.com)) to arrange the loan.

OVAS Program/Field Trip brochures  
1997-1998  
2016-2017

Limpkin Call newsletters  
Vol. VII, No. 3 Oct 1990  
Vol. XXI No. 1, 2, 3, & 4 fall 2005 - spring 2006  
Vol. XXV, No. Jan/Feb 2010  
Vol. XXV, No. 4 Mar/Apr 2010

In addition, we have scanned all our scrapbooks, but there were none after 2000. We've received some photos from 2008-present. If you have any photos of OVAS members doing anything OVAS-related 2001-present, or newspaper clippings about OVAS for 2001-present, please send them to Sherry.

## COMING EVENTS - Field Trips

Check our [website](#) for updated information and to register, and to view photos from recent field trips.

### Lunch on the Lawn Tuesday, March 10, 2020

Home of Joyce and Bill Stefancic, 14311 Hunters Trace Lane, Clermont (see previous page for driving directions)

Brown-bag lunch at 11:30 am

Walkabout and feeder watch as long as you choose to remain, ending at dusk (around 7:30 pm.)

While the Stefancics have many lawn chairs, it is suggested you bring your own lawn chair.

Park on the grass perpendicular to the drive.

Our next Lunch on the Lawn will be on Tuesday, March 10th, 2020. Joyce and Bill Stefancic have invited us to walk their property, and sit and watch their feeders while we share BYO lunch.

March 10th is an auspicious date – falling on the same day as the Holi festival day. Holi is popularly known as the Indian "festival of spring", the "festival of colors". The Holi festival signifies the arrival of spring, the end of winter, the blossoming of love, and for many a festive day to meet others, play and laugh, forget and forgive, and repair broken relationships.

According to Wikipedia, Holi celebrations begin the night before Holi with a Holika Dahan where people gather, perform religious rituals in front of the bonfire, and pray that internal evil be destroyed the way Holika, the sister of the demon king Hiranyakashipu, was destroyed by fire. The next morning is celebrated as Rangwali Holi – a free-for-all festival of colors, where people smear each other with colors and drench each other. Water guns and water-filled balloons are also used to play and color each other. Anyone and everyone are fair game, friend or stranger, rich or poor, man or woman, children, and elders. The frolic and fight with colors occurs in the open streets, open parks, outside temples and buildings. Groups carry drums and other musical instruments, go from place to place, sing and dance. People visit family, friends and foes to throw colored powders on each other, laugh and gossip, then share Holi delicacies, food and drinks.

You'll have to make your own bonfire and I don't expect anyone in our group will be throwing colored powders or shooting water guns, but we can enjoy this Festival of Spring by wearing bright colors, laughing and enjoying other birders company as we watch for birds at the Stefancic homestead.

The Stefancics have been birding all over the world, and their yard list of 90+ species is world-class. Some of the more sought-after birds that have appeared at their feeders include: Yellow-headed Blackbird, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Painted Bunting, Clay-colored Sparrow. They've seen Yellow-billed Cuckoo and Yellow-breasted Sapsucker on the property. Perhaps we will see some birds dressed up in many colors to enjoy the Holi festival along with us.

**RESERVATIONS:** Register and pay online at <https://oklawaha-valley-audubon.org/events/> If you have questions contact Peg Lindsay at [pegcondor@embarqmail.com](mailto:pegcondor@embarqmail.com)

**COST:** We suggest a donation to OVAS (\$10 for members and \$15 for non-members).

### Lunch on the Lawn, Thursday, April 23, 2020

Home of Donna and Russ Sass, Legacy of Leesburg

Join carpool/caravan at the Legacy Community Building parking lot 8:15 am

Coffee and donuts at their home, 8:30 am

Following our meet-and-greet, first stop: River Park

Other stops and short hikes (if time permits) within the Legacy Community

Followed by lunch on their patio overlooking their gardens with woodland backdrop

This event is different – Donna is fixing lunch for us

#### RESERVATIONS REQUIRED

Our next Lunch on the Lawn will be on Thursday, April 23rd, 2020. Donna and Russ Sass have invited us to visit their Community and their home. Because some locations within Legacy have limited space for parking, we will meet at the parking lot in front of the Legacy Community Building at 8:15 am. We will get into as few cars as possible before heading to their home for coffee and donuts.

Following that, we will caravan to River Park. Ruins of a kaolin processing plant are one feature within this tiny park. There are several benches for us to use, while Russ gives us a brief overview of the history of kaolin mining within Lake County. (You can google uses for kaolin, still mined today in southern Georgia.)

We'll then hike a short circular trail in River Park, which borders the Palatlahaha River and features hardwood hammock and cypress swamp remnants. This is a lovely, quiet little place set aside within our developed urban landscape.

If time permits, Russ will lead us to other hiking trails within Legacy, mostly bordering marshy areas and one large kaolin pit, now a lake. This is April, so most of the overwintering passerines have already departed for parts north. Expect birding to be minimal. There are, however, many herons and egrets, anhingas and cormorants found in and around the marshes and ponds. For those interested, we can visit a gopher pod after lunch.

After our caravan and hike, we'll enjoy lunch prepared for us by Donna Sass. (If you have special dietary requirements, BYO.) Their enclosed patio overlooks a manicured, mixed native and non-native wildflower garden. The backdrop for their garden is a hillside with a mixture of weedy wildflowers (hidden from sight by the downslope) which attract an abundance of butterflies. Beyond that is a ruderal woodland.

Peg Urban plans to invite her friend, Red Fussel, a native Lake Countian to attend as well. (Red was given credit as an original source in Gilbert King's historical narrative and book *Under a Ruthless Sun*. King's book is about a rape in the late 1940s, actions in the miscarriage of justice by the KKK and Sheriff Willis McCall.) Red also has written a book of Lake County history. I've also invited Joe and Margaret Branham. Joe has written about the history of Okahumpka, a sad tale of white settlers invading and settling within established native American lands.

**RESERVATIONS:** Register and pay online at <https://oklawaha-valley-audubon.org/events/> If you have questions contact Peg Lindsay at [pegcondor@embarqmail.com](mailto:pegcondor@embarqmail.com)

**COST:** We suggest a donation to OVAS (\$10 for members and \$15 for non-members).

## COMING EVENTS - Field Trips

Check our [website](#) for updated information and to register, and to view photos from recent field trips.

### Tubing at Ichetucknee Springs Wednesday, April 29, 2020

Tubing the Ichetucknee is great fun. So much fun that the river is loaded with visitors during hot summer days. The earlier we go, the less crowded the river will be for our group to enjoy. It's about a 2-hour drive from most places in Lake County. Depending on where you live, we can arrange carpools from various locations, so sign up early and indicate if you want a ride or if you're willing to accommodate others in your vehicle.

Because our group will be entering the park off-season, we will begin our adventure from the Midpoint Launch, which gives us about a 2-hour float time. Yes, the water will be cold. It's about 72°F year-round. Don't forget your dry clothes and shoes.

Signup for this event is a 2-part process. You sign up from our web page <https://oklawaha-valley-audubon.org/events/> and make your donation to OVAS. Then you notify me ([pegcondor@embarqmail.com](mailto:pegcondor@embarqmail.com)) which tube you choose to rent. You will pay me for the tube and I will issue a check to the vendor – the vendor is not allowed to accept cash within the park.

You can view the available tube rental options at [ichetuckneetubecenter.com](http://ichetuckneetubecenter.com). Prices for the tubes vary from \$4 to \$18. I recommend the Pro Tube with Bottom \$7.

Enter the park at the South Main Entrance, 12087 SW US-27. Make carpool arrangements so that you arrive at the Park by 9:15. There is a park entrance fee of \$6 per vehicle. Have exact change for an envelope because the gatehouse may not be manned in April.

Go immediately to the concession stand and purchase a wristband/tram ticket for \$5.50 plus tax. Then go back to the parking lot. Our group will assemble in the parking lot to meet our tube vendor – Linda from Ichetucknee Tube Center. Linda will hand out our tubes and I will give her a check. If Linda has time, she may give us a brief history of the area and tubing the Ichetucknee in particular.

Everyone carries their own tube to the tram. We ride the tram to the Midpoint launch site where we enter the water and float downstream. No food or drinks, pets, fishing, tobacco, alcohol or disposable items on the river. (Items may be inspected for compliance.)

At the end of the run, take your tube and drop it off by pole #4. Get on the tram and ride back to the South Entrance parking lot. As soon as everyone returns and changes into dry clothes, we'll find a quiet place to enjoy a BYO lunch. The concession stand does sell food, but it may not be open off-season. Linda says it's pricey.

## Breakfast on the "Lawn" Tuesday May 5th, 2020 Green Mountain Scenic Overlook

20700 County Road 455, Minneola, FL 34715  
Breakfast at the Overlook, 6:30 am

We have to get up HOW EARLY for this event? Well, the answer is you have to get up early enough to get there before sunrise. According to Professor Google, civil twilight begins at 6:17 am, sunrise occurs at 6:42 am, and civil (morning) twilight ends at 8:31 am on Tuesday, May 5th, 2020.

The path from the parking lot to the tower is an easy walk. There are plenty of benches with a view towards Lake Apopka to the east. You may bring your morning coffee along with your breakfast. We'll provide decadent donuts to enjoy while we listen for the morning songbird chorus, watch the twilight colors transform from shades of blue and gray to glorious rose and pink. The view over the tops of the trees towards Lake Apopka on the east is awesome.

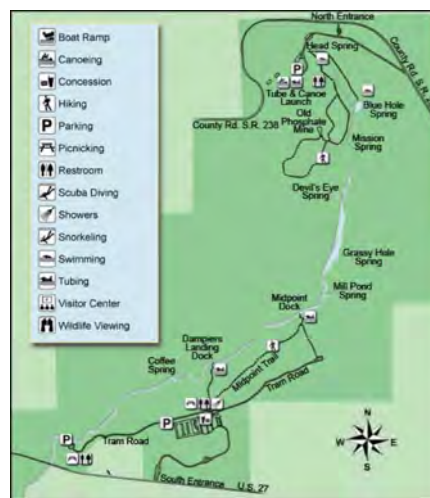
Don't forget your binoculars and spotting scope if you have one. GMSO is one of Lake County's birding hotspots and we should see a few late migrants as well as resident species. At least 135 species of birds and nearly 20 species of butterflies have been reported at the overlook.

If you choose to linger longer, you can take the connector trail to the Apopka Loop Trail and hike as far and as long as you like. I suspect most of us will enjoy the comraderie at breakfast and go home.

The land for the Green Mountain Scenic Overlook and Trailhead was leased to Lake County from the St. Johns River Water Management District. The overlook opened in October 2014, and connected to the Lake Apopka Loop Trail in 2015. The park contains a pavilion, educational kiosks, 0.4 miles (0.64 km) of winding trail down to the trailhead for the Lake Apopka Loop Trail, and an observation tower 132 feet (40 m) above sea level that provides views of Lake Apopka and the Orlando skyline.

**RESERVATIONS:** Register and pay online at <https://oklawaha-valley-audubon.org/events/> If you have questions contact Peg Lindsay at [pegcondor@embarqmail.com](mailto:pegcondor@embarqmail.com)

**COST:** We suggest a donation to OVAS (\$10 for members and \$15 for non-members).



# Review: OVAS Overnight Trip to the Big Cypress Seminole Reservation February 12-14, 2020

by Susan Vergnan

Great weather, an engaging itinerary, and a total of 76 bird species identified, including the Snail Kite, the Swallow-tailed Kite and the American Bittern made this year's overnight trip to the Big Cypress Seminole Reservation a delight. Our group of eighteen wended its way south with the first stop at Fisheating Creek Outpost, a wildlife and environmental area in Glade and Highlands Counties for a picnic lunch and a walk around this historic area. After lunch we crossed the bridge to the Fisheating Creek Wildlife Management Area to view the site of the former home and museum of Tom Gaskins, a "home-grown" naturalist and conservationist.

From there we went to Moore Haven to the Caloosahatchee Canal, once a major river, for an overlook, and then on to the locks at Okeechobee marsh. This was an interesting spot where we saw a couple of boats passing through and two Loggerhead Shrikes sunning themselves on the locks' fence.

At the Big Cypress Seminole Reservation we enjoyed the AH-TAH -THI-KI Museum's excellent film on the history of the Seminole tribe, after which we walked the mile-long boardwalk behind the museum, where the birding was quite good. At the end of the walk Seminole women were making and selling handicrafts. That afternoon we enjoyed a swamp buggy tour on the reservation where we saw Asian water buffalo, bison, zebras and antelopes, along with Osceola turkeys.

Highlights of the third day included a brief stop at the Brighton Seminole Reservation, where some of us viewed an exhibition of local handicrafts, and later a superb presentation on the Kissimmee River Restoration Project Phase 1 at the Riverside Field Lab in Lorinda by members of FAU's Center for Environmental Studies. The presentation was followed by a boat tour of the river to view some of the restoration work and do some birding along the way.

Many thanks to Clyde Stephens for a wonderful learning experience and to Peg Lindsay and Bob Putman for recording our bird sightings.



# OVAS Property in Orange County

You may have read Stephen Hudak's article in the February 10, 2020 print edition of the *Orlando Sentinel*, describing a conflict between OVAS and Mr. Kenneth Rubinson. Here are the facts:

On December 21, 2007 Mr. Rubinson donated about 6 acres of wooded land in Mt. Dora, but in Orange County. The property is a triangle, situated across from the Catholic Church on old 441 and adjacent to the Chesterhill subdivision. When transferred to us, the land was encumbered with a stormwater easement held by the church and with a conservation easement (CE) held by St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD). After we owned the property, a Corrective CE was executed on August 12, 2008, signed by Rubinson, to allow signs and to place the property in the appropriate county: Orange, not Lake County.

There is very little in OVAS' files about this property. It was a spring 2018 tax exemption notice from the Orange County Taxing Authorities that alerted us to the fact that we owned the property – no one on the Board at the time knew about it. We found the legal documents after an online search for Orange County property records. Those documents do not exist in OVAS' files nor were any related documents in our safe deposit box.

Our minutes also are scant. The minutes of the November 5, 2007 Board of Directors (BOD) meeting indicated then-President Jerry Bohmann stated that OVAS had been offered the property as a refuge and to be named for the donor. The Board wanted assurance that our liability insurance policy would cover the property and they wanted Board members to visit the property. The next mention of the property in our minutes was from the March 3, 2008 meeting, in a discussion of Mr. Rubinson's request for a letter from OVAS, for the IRS, acknowledging his contribution. We later learned (in November 2019) that there were additional records in our files: (1) January/February 2009 Limpkin Call newsletter [Mr. Bohmann was the newsletter editor at the time] stated that OVAS has been offered the property and that the directors of OVAS agreed to accept it; (2) April 7, 2008 minutes showed that Mr. Bohmann was looking for someone to make and donate "no trespassing" signs; (3) September 8, 2008 minutes wherein Mr. Bohmann advised he sent paperwork to Orange County re: tax exemption and that OVAS had been prohibited to place such signs on the property; Mr. bohmann had contacted Mr. Rubinson for the purpose of correcting the CE to allow a sign. I attempted to contact Mr. Bohmann several times in spring and summer 2018, but he did not respond. I tried again recently and learned his email account has been disabled. More recently (January 2020) we found some additional information in the Treasurer's boxed files.

On May 2 and on May 30, 2018 the BOD discussed cost-saving measures. One was the possibility of dropping our general liability insurance, saving us \$1000-\$2000/year. We did not want to drop this insurance, though, as long as we owned property. Hence, on May 30, the BOD voted unanimously to divest of the property due to lack of resources. We approached non-profit organizations, offering to donate the property to the Catholic diocese (July 2018), Audubon Florida (August 2018), and Trout Lake Nature Center (October 2018); each refused it.

The original and the corrective CE both indicated they were granted as a condition of a cited [non-existent] SJRWMD permit "solely to offset adverse impacts to natural resources, fish and wildlife, and wetland functions". Within them, Mr. Rubinson expressed his "desire to preserve the Property in its natural condition in perpetuity".

After refusals by the three non-profits, we phoned SJRWMD to (1) ask them if they wanted the property and (2) get information about the permit cited in the CEs. That began a dialogue during which we learned fortuitously that SJRWMD recently had flagged the CE because they had no record of the permit cited in the CE, nor knew of what permit might be associated with the property, if any. They indicated one option was for them to release the CE. Given that the non-profits did not appear interested in accepting donated property, we sought to enhance the desirability (e.g., value) of the property to facilitate divesting of it, and in January 2019 we sent SJRWMD a letter requesting they release the CE. They did in late March.

The property, no longer encumbered with a conservation easement, was offered at market value to a Chesterhill HOA in June 2019; they turned down the offer. In August 2019, we signed a contract with a realtor to sell the property. Any proceeds would have been used to further our strategic plan. The property is zoned A-1 (General Agriculture District) which includes a limited number of uses, or more uses, still limited, with additional site development or use permits approved by the Zoning Administrator. It does not include gas stations.

OVAS Board members of record were mailed a letter with attachments, dated November 5, 2019, from Mr. Timothy Hoban, Mr. Rubinson's attorney. Mr. Hoban also sent us several follow-up letters or emails and Mr. Rubinson sent us one. The letters contained false allegations and use disquieting language, threatening litigation for fraud unless we acquiesce to their demands (Mr. Hoban alleges that Mr. Bohmann made oral promises re: the property, but admits that such conversations were not documented). Over time, Mr. Hoban worked to coordinate a transfer of the property to the Catholic Church and to enlist the Chesterhill Subdivision to hold CEs on the property (yes, two entities that previously had refused the property). We solicited professional advice and, on January 29, met with and retained Mr. Zachary Broome, as our attorney.

Since Mr. Hoban first contacted us in November 2019, our position always remained constant. We are more than willing to deed the property to the Catholic Church or any other non-profit and sign Conservation Easements, provided the transactions occur at no cost to us. The CE(s) can be signed at closing or, if we sign them in advance, those papers are to be held in escrow by Bowen|Schroth until the closing to ensure closing actually takes place. In return, and because of the disquieting language and ever-changing demands in Mr. Hoban's correspondence over time, we require Mutual Releases. This accomplishes both Mr. Rubinson's and OVAS' goals. We would like to do this as soon as possible.

The negotiations and stumbling blocks can be discussed at our annual meeting on March 1.

Sheryan Epperly Chester  
Director-at-Large



## Central Florida Regional Conservation Committee January 12, 2020

The January 12 RCC meeting was held via conference call. The RCC is composed of representatives from Audubon Chapters in Central Florida: Orange, Ridge, West Volusia, Southeast Volusia, Highlands, Halifax River, Kissimmee Valley, Lake Region, Oklawaha. The RCC meets three times per year to share information and provide updates on our regional conservation priorities for 2020 which are 1) promote Lake Apopka restoration, visitor access and a new Audubon Nature Center, and 2) Monitor and act on local and state government land use decisions impacting wildlife habitat in our geographic area.

At the January 12 meeting, the new Conservation Leadership Initiative (CLI) Coordinator, Kristen Sims, was introduced. Kristen will coordinate CLI graduates throughout the state connecting them with each other and with their local Audubon chapter activities. Kristen is based at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland. The president of the new UCF Audubon chapter, Lauren Puleo, was also introduced.

Charles Lee, Director of Advocacy for the FL Audubon Central Florida Policy Office, gave updates on legislative issues.

A decision was made on December 12 on the Osceola Parkway extension through a portion of Split Oak Forest, a wilderness conservation lands east of Orlando in Osceola County. This was a compromise solution to the original proposal. It will add ten new acres of mitigation land to every one acre affected by the project. The RCC recommends chapters continue to pressure local officials to provide adequate funding for this.

There is concern about the request by CEMEX to expand their mining in the Green Swamp Wilderness area. 322,000 acres of the Green Swamp region was designated as an Area of Critical State Concern in 1974. It is located west of Highway 27 and east of Interstate 75 in Polk, Lake, Sumter, Hernando and Pasco Counties. The headwaters of the Peace River, Withlacoochee River, Oklawaha River, and Hillsborough River are located here. It's 560,000 acres of wetlands, flatlands and low ridges are bounded by prominent sandy ridgelines. Rainwater drains across the surface to create headwaters of four major rivers: the Withlacoochee, the Oklawaha, the Hillsborough and the Peace. Rainwater also trickles down through the soil to replenish the Floridan aquifer system, the primary source of drinking water for most Floridians. The RCC chapters in that region were urged to contact the Lake County Commissioners to oppose the CEMEX request for exemption. The Lake County Commission cannot approve this project on their own. It will also need to be approved by the Department of Economic Opportunity Division of Community Planning.

Another issue of concern discussed was legislation related to biosolid disposal. There is a company which wants to dump biosolids from treatment facilities on land in the Kissimmee basin which would increase nitrogen affecting water resources. There is proposed legislation to tighten regulations and eliminate an exemption that currently allows this dumping. There is new technology that was started and had success in the City of Sanford some years ago to convert the biosolids to energy. That was abandoned during the Governor Scott era. RCC members were encouraged to advocate at the local level to encourage innovation to deal with biosolids from treatment facilities rather than dumping them on land.

Northern Harriers along North Shore Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive. Photos by Alex Chester.



# OVAS - Join/Renew/Support

You are what hope looks like to a bird.

We're in a race against time to give birds and wildlife a fighting chance in a changing world. Show your love today by joining, renewing, or donating to Oklawaha Valley Audubon Society (OVAS).

Membership benefits include: Household membership (\$15/yr); Timely, relevant news about birds, their habitats, and the issues that affect them; Planned birding, environmental, and community events happening near you; A powerful voice in the fight to protect birds and wildlife, plus advocacy opportunities; Receive Oklawaha Valley Audubon's bi-monthly newsletter and other communications; Helping support OVAS partner organizations; Special offers and discounts available only to members.

By joining or renewing your local Audubon chapter, you support Oklawaha Valley Audubon directly. All funds stay with our chapter and support the organization of educational programs, field trips, our conservation efforts, as well as allow us to help our partner organizations locally.

We appreciate your support annually at the beginning of each FY/program year, which is July 1. Membership is not a requirement to attend or participate in the OVAS programs or field trips. There are 3 ways to join/renew OVAS locally.

You can use the renewal form below. Mail your check to OVAS, PO Box 268, Eustis, FL 32727.

You can pay at a monthly program with cash or check.

You can go to <https://oklawaha-valley-audubon.org> and click on Join Audubon and pay with PayPal.

## OVAS Membership Application

New \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal \_\_\_\_\_ Today's Date \_\_\_\_\_

Print Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address(es) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number(s) \_\_\_\_\_

### Committee that you would be willing to volunteer assistance:

\_\_\_\_\_ Citizen Science Committee- help organize or participate in the annual Emeralds Christmas bird count, monthly bird counts, monitor local rookeries, and /or record field trip reports data

\_\_\_\_\_ Fundraising Committee – Assist with Donation box, boat rides, raffles, and special events

\_\_\_\_\_ Hospitality Committee – Help with refreshments for membership meetings and 2 potlucks

\_\_\_\_\_ Membership Committee – membership and e-mail list, new name tags, sign-in book

\_\_\_\_\_ Conservation Committee - attend public meetings, help write letters to legislators

\_\_\_\_\_ Outreach Committee - Set up display at events, maintain bulletin board at TLNC, advertise events in newspapers/internet

\_\_\_\_\_ Digital Communications Committee - website, e-mail blasts, Facebook and social media

\_\_\_\_\_ Newsletter Committee - bi-monthly electronic newsletter and OVAS brochures

**OVAS is a Florida Not-for-Profit Corporation**

<https://oklawaha-valley-audubon.org> (352) 432-8866

<https://www.facebook.com/Oklawaha-Valley-Audubon-Society>



Oklawaha Valley Audubon Society

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**TO:**