

## Cedar Keys Audubon Spring 2022 Avocet Newsletter

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Florida 2017 Chapter of the Year

*Our mission is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds,  
other wildlife, and habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity.*

### **Cedar Key Audubon is back on track**

It has been a long two years for Cedar Keys Audubon (CKA). Staying relevant during the pandemic has been a challenge. The struggle has been to determine how. Remember, that the pandemic even closed down the Island to outsiders for a long period of time. Fortunately, there has been a core of intrepid members who refused to allow CKA die. Birds rescued, purple martin nests erected and managed, bird feeders maintained, bird counts started and published Avocets were kept going. Of course, there was also the business of keeping CKA legitimate with annual 501.c3 State registration, annual reports for National Audubon, and financial reviews. A special thanks to Mac Cox with this last job. But nature/birding walks and programs were not advisable or even possible.

While we all should be cautiously optimistic, Monday, February 28 may mark the beginning of some very positive changes. Thanks to the tireless efforts of our program chair, Boyd Kimball, we had our first program since the pandemic closed us down. Scott and Beth Wright provided an informative and engaging presentation about their research on manatees. The program was well attended with over 50 folks. It was also nice to witness the respect shown for others by everyone wearing masks.

### **We need your help to build on this success**

Presently, what we do next is being outlined by a committee of seven with only one designated officer, Linda Kimball, our treasurer. Be sure to renew your annual membership and let us know if you would like to take an active role. Let us

know of your special interests and skills that you would like to share.

### **Mark your calendar for our annual meeting**

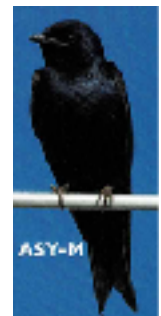
On March 27, 2022 from 4-6 PM, the Cedar Keys Audubon will have its annual meeting at the Island Hotel Courtyard on second street. Membership renewals will be available but the meeting is open to anyone interested in our mission, so feel free to invite a guest. There will be appetizers, a cash bar & CKA merchandise. Great time to get reacquainted.

### **Purple Martins at Cedar Key**

by Scott Wright

Well, it's that time of year again when the Martins begin arriving from Brazil. There have been reports of Martins sighted along both coasts of Florida and north into southern Georgia. But so far, the birds have not graced our shores.

In anticipation of their arrival, it's time to raise up the nest boxes. But before that, it is important to make sure the nest boxes are clean. Turns out, adult birds are infested with parasitic mites. They bring the mites with them into the nest. Over the nesting period, the mites increase in numbers infesting the nestlings as well. If the nest box is clean, the mites typically do not increase in numbers sufficient to hurt the newly hatched birds. But a dirty nest left from the previous nesting season will contain large numbers of mites that will survive during the off season. They will then infest the newly hatched birds in much larger numbers often killing the hatchlings. It's easy to clean out the nest boxes. Remove the old nest material. Be careful because the



mites are all in the material and they will enjoy getting on you. Wash out the nest box with soapy water. This is enough to kill the mites. Let the nest box dry and then replace the nest material with fresh dry pine needles or straw. Make sure to vacuum the rugs and check the AC filters. Then you are all set. It's best to raise up the nest boxes into position now for when the birds arrive. Purple Martin activity has been minimal so far in Cedar Key. However, the CKA Purple Martin houses at the hardware store are active with at least 4 pair of Martins!

### **Owls, Hawks, Pelicans, Osprey and an Oystercatcher – Oh My!**

by Maureen Magee

Our small Bird Rescue and Transport Team has been very busy. The same dedicated handful of rescuers continues to answer the calls we receive for wounded birds. We are still seeing the unnecessary entanglement of birds with fishing lines and hooks. These injuries to our birds could be avoided with a few extra minutes of time from responsible fishermen, reeling in birds and untangling them, instead of cutting fishing lines and letting birds suffer with hooks embedded in their bills and wings. Raising awareness is key.

In addition, a high number of birds have been rescued with broken bones. While these birds are mostly hawks and owls, this year we have also seen more Great Blue Herons, with wing damage. Because of the locations where these birds are found, the injuries seem to be related to vehicle impact.

Cormorants were brought to us in higher numbers this year. They appeared to be suffering neurologic problems. We thought the problem might have been the Red Tide, or perhaps a disease called Newcastle. Without the expensive necropsies, we do not have a definitive answer.



And then there is the Oystercatcher! While his injury appears to be vehicle impact, he is doing quite well at the Nature World

Wildlife rehab center in Homosassa, where many of our rescues go to recuperate. The fun part of this rescue was my mission to find oysters until transport. Yes, the bird does have the proper name for what he does. So thank you to Heath Davis and Shawn Stephenson for guiding me to some oysters!

Putting aside these stories of rescues, my main message here is that we need more help on our small rescue team, both seasonal residents who are much appreciated, but also those who are still here year round when our other volunteers have headed North! We are calling again and again on the same few dedicated people. We must expand our team to include more transporters (drivers to the rehab center) who do not have to be in direct contact with the birds, just the carriers. In addition, we need those willing to be hands-on in securing these birds. We offer training for those new to the team. You will quickly learn how rewarding a feeling it is to wear that bright neon rescue vest and have successfully secured an injured bird.

[Please contact me for more details and an unabashed sales pitch! Maureen 239-253-8824 - Text is best.](#)

### **Notice to those involved in Bird Rescue on Cedar Key** from Maureen

I live in the "downtown" area, near the water, where many of the rescues occur. I have an easy-access supply of:

- Carriers
- Gloves
- Fishing hook cutters
- Protective goggles
- Assorted Nets
- First aid kits
- Towels & Sheets
- Rescuer Vests for identification

All of these things may be borrowed as needed.

Please contact me to arrange a time to come by so that you know where everything is ahead of time for any future rescues.

Maureen 239-253-8824 - text is best Team Work!



## **Silent Earth: Averting the Insect Apocalypse.**

(2021) by Dave Goulson reviewed by John Terborgh the James B. Duke Professor Emeritus of Environmental Science at Duke University & David S. Wilcove, Professor of Ecology, Evolutionary Biology, and Public Affairs at Princeton University.

John grew up in Arlington Virginia in the 1950s and can remember birding with Roger Tory Peterson on the Chesapeake and Ohio canal towpath in Cabin John, Maryland. At that time, the most common bird in the DC region was deemed to be the red-eyed vireo and the second most common the redstart. No one would say that now. There are still red-eyed vireos but not many redstarts – or caerulean warblers, Kentucky

warblers, black-and-white warblers or worm-eating warblers or . . . . What has happened? The woods along the towpath in Cabin John have hardly changed since the 1950s. Yes, the Clara Barton Parkway has brought more traffic, but the canal and the lands between the canal and the river have been protected throughout.

The same can be said of, Glover-Archbold Park where there are also records from the 1950s. Even then, the park was embedded in the city and little has changed subsequently, but the birds have changed dramatically. These changes have been slow, almost imperceptible to the casual observer. Few alive today remember how it was in the 1950s. This is what we call the “shifting baseline,” a cultural memory that extends back only as far as one’s childhood. What happened before that is lost to contemporary consciousness. And thus it is with all of us. But records exist and scientists are alarmed by the magnitude and geographical extent of declines in our nation’s birdlife and by our own ignorance of the causes.

As for magnitude and extent of declines, a team of scientists based at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology published a report in 2019

announcing that the U. S. has lost 3 billion birds, equivalent to nearly 30% of the North American total estimated for 1970. Most severely affected were sparrows, warblers and finches. Declines were noted for all habitats East and West, North and South, except for wetlands (Rosenberg et al. 2019). David wondered, why are wetland species increasing? That same year, the Canadian government published its own independent assessment largely supporting the findings of the U. S. group. Shorebirds, especially, were down along with grassland birds and aerial foragers such as swifts and swallows. But in Canada, unlike the U. S., forest birds appear to be holding their own (North American Bird Conservation-Canada 2019). Even more mysterious are recent reports of sharp declines in bird populations in protected tropical forests in Panama and Brazil. Is what we perceive to be a local issue in our own communities actually a reflection of a global phenomenon?

Why is this happening? Multiple causes are likely to blame. Among the most affected species are long-distance migrants, birds that spend the winter in the tropics. For these species, the hazards are many. Deforestation and degradation of essential wintering habitats continues in the tropics; intensification of land use for agriculture and forestry along with expanding urbanization are degrading breeding habitats in North America; and on migration, birds are confronted with losses of resting and refueling habitat with unknown consequences. On top of these hazards, huge numbers of migrating birds die en route from road, building and tower strikes. Feral cats are estimated to kill an additional billion birds a year (ref). And lurking in the background of all this has been a huge increase over the last half-century in the use of chemical fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides. Birds are forced to run a gauntlet of lethal hazards where they breed, where they winter and in-between. Is it any wonder they are suffering declines?

But there is another looming threat of a more subtle nature of which we are only now



becoming aware - an even more drastic decline in insect populations. How many readers remember deploying a bug screen to protect their radiators from being plugged with insect bodies while driving through the country in the summertime? If you lived in the 1950 and '60s, almost everyone had one. But I haven't seen one in years. The extent and severity of insect declines are matters of contention in the scientific community, but nothing convinces more than one's own experience, and John vividly remember driving across Texas and Oklahoma in the 1950s when nearly every passing car was shielded by a bug screen. For these screens to be nothing but a memory now, something has had to change and change dramatically. So the problem of declining birds may not be so much with their habitats as with the insects that provide their main summer food supply and which, for many species, are the principal source of protein fed to young birds in the nest.

Habitat degradation, building strikes and feral cats kill billions of birds each year, and climate change poses further stresses, but these losses could be sustainable if everything else were normal. But when critical food supplies drop to a level that parent birds can no longer meet the needs of their growing offspring, we have a crisis. Could some of the chemicals we apply to the environment by the (millions?) of tons be poisoning insects on a continental scale? At this point, science has no definite answer. Some of our colleagues are skeptical that chemicals applied locally could have broader impacts across the landscape. But this is what the skeptics said when Rachel Carson pointed the finger at DDT. It took years of research to fill in the details, but we learned that DDT was bioconcentrating and poisoning species at the top of the food chain, most notoriously, bald eagles and peregrine falcons. Meanwhile, further cases of a similar nature have come to light. Swainson's hawks, a species that breeds in North America, were dying by the thousands on their Argentine wintering grounds, poisoned by monocrotophos, an

insecticide used to control grasshoppers (Goldstein et al. 1999). California condors narrowly escaped extinction from incidentally consuming lead in game animals shot but not recovered by hunters. And vultures in India crashed to near extinction from consuming carcasses of animals treated with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs diclofenac and nimesulide (Cuthbert et al. 2015). In each of these cases, bans of the offending chemicals were instituted and the toll on birds was reversed. In truth, we don't know all the factors behind the loss of billions of birds, much less are we able to quantify them. But we do know that our birds are losing ground every year to largely unknown causes and that the trend is taking us to a truly silent spring.

#### **Editorial note**

by Jay Bushnell

Some of you may have read my review on Silent Earth, published in the Cedar Keys News. John lives in Cedar Key and we were both surprised to learn each of us had reviewed the book. With John and David's review and mine, you have two reviews from different perspectives that I believe will enriches your understanding of the problems facing humanity with climate change. One review draws upon a knowledge that focuses on what is happening to birds. The other review draws upon the evolution of humans. Both reviews also include personal experiences that enhances the importance of what Goulson outlines in his book. You will also notice that both reviews draws attention to the issue of better understanding the concept of '**baseline**'. As I mentioned in my review, people tend to live in the present which tends to anchor their '**baseline**' about the world they live to a limited time frame. I assure you that the winters in Florida we have been having recently are not even close to what I experienced in the 1950s. We had really cold winters even in St. Petersburg.