

## Cedar Keys Audubon Spring 2023 Avocet Newsletter

P.O. Box 96 Cedar Key, FL 32625 cedarkeysaudubon@gmail.com,  
cedarkeysaudubon.org Facebook - Cedar Keys Audubon CHAPTER CODE: E-53  
501(c)3



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.*

### Purple Martins!

by Scott Wright

As in years past, the Purple Martins that call Cedar Key their nesting home arrived in late February. It seems that other Martins arrive in southern and central Florida in January. For some reason our birds are later. While they are not banded, we know that the Martins that come here are “our” birds because Martins have a strong nest fidelity returning to the same location to nest each year.

The Purple Martin houses located near hardware store downtown are packed with birds. Initially, I had only installed six nest boxes and those filled up quickly with other birds milling about on the perches. After installing another six boxes, they quickly filled up as well. So far, of the twelve nests boxes only one has a sparrow nest. All the others are occupied by Purple Martins.

We have eggs! The photos were taken on Thursday, April 13. Despite their arrival in February, in the last week or so, eggs have appeared in at least 8 of the nest boxes.

They range in number for 3 to 5 eggs. Typically, the eggs take from 15-18 days to hatch. Young birds leave the nest (fledge) from 26-31 days after hatching. So, it's a quick process. If there is time,



Purple Martins can lay a second clutch, but it's never assured that they will. Because Martins bring fresh green leaves to the nest just before they lay eggs, seeing the birds bring more leaves after their first clutch has fledged is a good sign they plan to lay again. We'll see.



Cedar Keys

Audubon is excited to expand the number of nest boxes for Purple Martins. We have received permission from the City to install another gourd rack on City property located across First street in the marina parking lot. The rack will be less than 100 feet from the existing rack next to the hardware store and easily visible. Further, the Cedar Keys Audubon will also install an interpretive sign at the same location. The sign will explain Purple Martin biology and illustrate the birds, their life stages, and migratory routes with photographs and illustrations. We hope to have this project completed by the fall.

### Expecting the Unexpected

By Ann Kamzelski

Whenever I am out and about in Cedar Key in my golf cart, I take my camera with my long zoom lens. I do this because I often come across birds feeding, flying and doing what birds do. I have places that I go where I can almost always expect to find an egret or heron fishing or terns or pelicans sitting. These locations are fairly predictable. Over the years, I have gotten some really nice images. However, this past

winter I have had unexpected things happen.

First, there was the day that a juvenile Cooper's Hawk flew across the street right at eye level in front of my golf cart. I jumped because I almost hit it. To my surprise, it landed in a tree right next to the road. I whipped out my camera and managed to get two nice photos before he/she flew off. I have seen them around before but never at such close range. Then one afternoon, I was on my way to visit a friend. When I turned onto her street, I saw a small group of white birds



resting on the dock at the end of the street. I slowly drove toward them to get a picture fully expecting to see a set of Ibis or Snowy Egrets sitting there. Amazingly, I was wrong. On the dock was a Snowy Egret, an Ibis and two immature Little Blue Herons (these are white as youngsters). I said to myself, "all I need is a Great Egret and I will have all the large white birds that we usually see in Cedar Key". To my astonishment, just at that moment, a Great Egret landed on the dock. Once the other birds settled down, I was able to get some nice images of the four different birds all in one spot. It is like a primer for identifying white wading birds.

Finally, just the other day I was driving down the street on the way to the airport. This time of year, there are lots of terns and cormorants lounging there. I can also find some the smaller migrating birds that hang out on the edge of the shore. However, on this day, I had another surprise. Sitting on the beach with water lapping at her feet was a Cattle Egret. These are not water birds! You see them in pastures

hanging out with cows and horses.

I have no idea what she was doing there. She tried to land on a perch that was already taken by a Royal Tern. The tern told her to head back inland where she belonged. She stayed a few more minutes and flew off. Cattle Egrets do nest at Snake Key, so maybe she was on her way there, but she didn't stay long enough for me to ask.



### Bird Walk With Naturalist

by Donna Krefth Thalacker

There were 10 birders for the April 11 morning bird walk. We met at the Cedar Key Park parking lot and car pooled together to a site just off the island. The weather was perfect - crystal blue skies and enough of a breeze so biting insects were not a problem! We saw plenty of birds and in addition, heard many more species than we saw. Most notable sightings were a Green heron, immature white Little Blue heron, Eastern Towhee, and a Gray Kingbird.



Stay tuned for our next walk that will be posted on our Audubon Facebook page!

### Spring Is Here!

by Thomas White

This is the time of the greatest change-over of birds on the Cedar Keys. The Winter residents leave (largely ducks and Winter warblers), the Summer residents (breeders) arrive

and build nests, and the Spring migrants arrive from South America and the Caribbean, replenish, feed and rest, linger for a few days, and depart northwards. This process is ongoing and has already started.

Cedar Keys are an important stop-over for migrating birds. They are often exhausted after flying over the Caribbean sea. Cedar Keys are on the Eastern Flyway here on the East Coast of Florida. Literally, millions of birds (of many species) use this route to migrate.

Watch for Spring migrants (they may not be here long) and be prepared for mixed flocks (many species traveling together). warblers, blackbird-types and shorebirds are especially notorious for mixed flocks but any species may be included in a mixed flock. Dozens of warbler species have been recorded here. One must be observed carefully or an unusual sighting may be missed.

### Bird Rescue Update

The Cedar Keys Audubon Annual Membership Meeting was held March 26 at the Island Hotel patio. Over 50 people were in attendance. It was announced at the meeting the Cedar Keys Audubon chapter will phase out management of all local bird rescue activities. Our mission for bird advocacy and conservation will remain strong and continue to grow in the future.

Bird rescue will continue in Cedar Key. Cedar Keys Audubon is phasing out the lead role in management of bird rescue primarily because we do not have the number of volunteers to do it well. No longer will be able to answer calls for rescue. The program will continue under another entity with some support of the Cedar Keys Audubon.

### The Value of Birds!

by Jay Bushnell-past CKA president

I am not a birder in the truest sense. Oh, I get excited when I come upon an unexpected encounter. Two different times a few years ago on creeks connected to the Suwannee River, I saw groups of Limpkin. My birder friends

confirmed my suspicion that this is unusual. Finally, I will cherish the first time I saw Scrub Jays. Their behavior was as described in the literature-very comical.

Yet I believe the real value of paying attention to birds is that they provide valuable data points of what is happening to our planet. Audubon has three functions, conservation, birding and environmental justice. My impression is that the conservation and environmental justice functions are some times overshadowed by birding. Accurate birding does help to monitor the conservation need. But as John Terborgh's presentation for CKA clearly pointed out, birds are disappearing by the billions as are the insects vital to biological diversity.

For example, when we started coming to Fowler's Bluff 20 years ago, Chuck-Will's-Widow were common in the late evening (I saw the first one in years last Saturday morning). No doubt you have noticed loss of bird varieties. These losses document our own self destruction. Today the canary in the coal mine metaphor applies to most all birds. Their extinction serves as a sentinel of the destruction of biodiversity that makes our life possible. Industrial society has graduated from massive guns used to cause the extinction of passenger pigeon.



Billions of birds each year are being pushed to extinction through urban structures, pollution, loss of habitat and climate change.