

## Cedar Keys Audubon Summer 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.*

The CKA board is reaching out to members and friends to urge everyone to stay safe. Social distancing will likely be the norm for some time. Knowing this, we have been functioning but mostly from home. In this newsletter, we wanted to give you a sense of what has happened during the pandemic. Cedar Key was closed for eight weeks except for folks who lived or worked on the island. The University of Florida had a team of medical staff test 504 volunteers for the coronavirus to establish a data baseline. Only two positives resulted; both were false positives. You will read that there was still a lot of birding. There has also been a lot of planning for the future.

### The Purple Martin Adventure by Scott Wright

To fulfill a National Audubon grant, CKA tackled setting up two purple martin (PM) complexes. Everyone involved was a novice when we started. Fortunately, we got some very helpful guidance from Dr. Jason Fischer, Conservation Program Manager Disney's Animals, Science, and Environment. It became clear that one does not just set the complexes out and they will come! Until they are established, purple martins need foster parents. Scott and Beth Wright came to the rescue. Scott shares their adventure.

One complex of six units, with 'AC and a view overlooking the marsh' was set up on their property. In early February, Ronnie Taylor graciously gave us permission to install another condo on his lot between the Hardware Store and Fire Station.

Now it became a family affair with the Wright's daughter, Irene, on pandemic hiatus from college, helping to install the unit.

In the meantime, PMs were arriving on the Island and returning to established older condos, many unknown to us. Every day, they would fly and chortle right over our new condos ignoring them. I purchased a song box and timer to lure in the birds. Not knowing the best volume setting, we had to lower the volume when we started getting calls from the commercial airlines because the noise was scaring the passengers when the jets flew over at 45,000 feet. Also in the meantime, a bevy of English



Sparrows decided they were less discerning than the PMs and started to move in. I had read that this might be a problem and so began removing sparrow nest material several times a month. Then I tried plugging the entrances to each unit hoping to thwart attempts to re-nest. That did not seem to work either as the sparrows seemed to hang around the condos out of spite. They were not nesting, just there...all the time.

Then one day it happened. Eureka! We had found a tolerable volume for the song box and lo and behold PMs were buzzing the condo! Right there! Six or eight of them were flying about and calling and trying to land when.....there he was.....the sparrow from hell! He would chase away the PMs every time they tried to land. After about 10 minutes the martins left but the sparrow remained. No martins returned but the sparrow stood on the perch and shouted to the world that he was ruler of the realm, every day. day after day. Then I suppose he got bored because he too did not visit the condo much anymore. While all this saga was unfolding, I did notice that several martins seemed to fly south over our property to fly over the marsh and then fly back north each day. After some sleuthing I discovered another condo (privately owned, smaller unit, no AC, no view) which was where these martins were nesting. But aghast, the martins were nesting right next to.....English Sparrows! How could this be? They were actually talking to each other, like they were friends!

Then just this past weekend, I heard the Purple Martin song box, except it wasn't our box, it was a real martin! Yes, a real bird! There he was resplendent in his blue black shiny feathers. First on the perch, then at each vestibule, he would stick half his body inside the entrance but not go completely inside. He did this to each unit. Another martin arrived and sat on the perch singing. After a short while it flew away. Then the first bird left only to return about an hour later and repeat the same curious behavior. After a while it flew away and has not been back yet. No sign of the sparrows either. I lowered the condo and everything looked fine. So keeping fingers crossed the martins will return. We are nearing the end of the time of year when new birds arrive and seek nesting sites. I am confident that we will get birds. I just don't know when, but it will be exciting.

### **Cedar Key During the Shutdown** by Ann Kamzelski

Living in Cedar Key and being a photographer is a wonderful combination, especially, when the island has been closed down because of a dangerous virus. I love to ride around in my golf cart with my camera and see what I can photograph. I can't think of a better way to spend my afternoons or sometimes mornings. This was an activity that I enjoyed even more often during this trying period. There were fewer people around than normal, and the number of birds seemed to increase. Birds are my favorite subject here because they are so abundant and accessible. I was lucky enough to find a group of avocets, roseate spoonbills and short-bill dowitchers that I watched several different days from a short distance away. I also got numerous images of



various egrets and herons feeding and flying. But there were little birds too. We feed the birds in our back yard and have seen many indigo buntings, blue grosbeaks, rose breasted grosbeaks; as well as cardinals and a myriad of other small

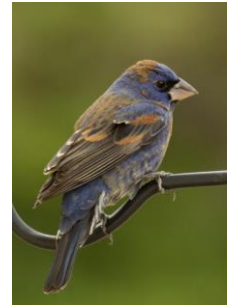
birds. Even riding in the golf cart, I have come across scarlet tanagers and several woodpeckers. The golf cart, for whatever reason, works like a blind. Birds don't seem to be as skittish when I am in it. I also have friends on the island who will call me if they see something interesting. With so many of my normal happenings on hold, I was almost always available to jump in the golf cart and race off to the location for a photo op. All in all, not only did photography give me something to do, I ended up with a host of wonderful images that I probably wouldn't have if life had been running on a normal schedule.



### **Looking ahead to a Brighter Day** By Tom White

No one knows when we maybe able do some of the things we have done in the past. Yet we are planning for that day. Until that time, here is trip you could do on your own. A field trip to Goethe State Forest is high on the list. One destination in

Goethe to visit is the Big Cypress Boardwalk. It is a true old-growth forest and the habitat of the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker. One must travel 15-20 minutes down an unpaved road (Cow Creek Rd) but most vehicles should have no problems. The walk itself is fairly short but sturdy shoes are required as much of the walk is covered with largish gravel. There is significant interpretation with signs identifying trees and controlled burning practices, plant communities, and swamp wildlife (much of which features poisonous snakes to keep visitors on the trail). The main attraction of course is the giant cypress tree at the end of the walk. At some point, it suffered a catastrophic failure (it was so big) so now it is truncated. It is still over 100 feet tall and still alive. There are also some other large cypress trees in the area.



The bad news is there are relatively few birds to be seen as they are up in the treetops. The good news is at this time of year the temperature and humidity are not oppressive. Little rain has minimized the insects and presently the swamp itself is almost dry. Best of all is there is no one there - it is perfect for picnicking and being outside during a pandemic.

From Cedar Key, take US 19 south to the Lebanon Station exit. Stay on FL 121 toward Williston. In 2-3 miles, there is a well-marked entrance to the road to the Big Cypress Boardwalk.

### **Bird Rescue**

The well recognized bird rescue project has been closed for quit some time. Of course, the calls continued and Captain Doug tends to answer some of the calls. Word has it he and Maureen tackled a vulture call. Not sure how it ended but good luck with that.

**Cedar Keys Audubon Membership Renewal**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_  
email \_\_\_\_\_ (used for newsletter & announcements) Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Do not have email

Yes, Enroll me with the Cedar Keys Audubon **regardless of my home address**. Please make check for \$20 payable to National Audubon Society.

I would like to make an additional donation for \$ \_\_\_\_\_ made payable to Cedar Keys Audubon.

We are tax deductible under USC 501(c)3. Advocating for Birds and Conservation

**Volunteer areas of interest (Please circle):** Board Membership, Web master, Bird Rescue, Education, Outreach, Demonstration, Presentations, Advocacy, Special Projects, Bird Nature Walks, Event support, or Other \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: Cedar Keys Audubon, PO Box 96, Cedar Key, Fl 32625 CHAPTER CODE: E-53  
cedarkeysaudubon@gmail.com — cedarkeysaudubon.org — Facebook

