



Until Further Notice

As we all continue to adjust to the new realities brought on by the COVID-19 (coronavirus) outbreak, we want to assure you that Hilton Head Audubon is taking all necessary steps to protect the health and well being of its members.

Effective immediately, we are taking the following actions:

Meetings: We have decided to *cancel* the April 9 membership meeting. A scheduled vote on our updated bylaws and election of officers for the fiscal year beginning in May will be conducted through an online polling mechanism. Details will be provided via email.

Picnic: Given the amount of planning involved and recommendations from the CDC and President Trump to severely curtail public gatherings, we are postponing this year's picnic and will evaluate whether it is feasible for us to hold it in September.

Field Trips and Newhall Walks: Effective immediately, all field trips and the Tuesday Newhall walks are cancelled, in line with President Trump's guidance to avoid gatherings of more than 10 people at this time. We take this step with profound sadness, since connecting people with nature is at the heart of Audubon's mission.

Given our country's resilience and resolve, we are confident that in time we will be able to resume our membership programs and field trips. In the meantime, we will be exploring a number of creative alternatives to our usual programming. Birding and enjoying the outdoors can be a remarkable stress reliever in these difficult times; we just need to be smart about how we do it.

Please be on the lookout for further updates via email, Facebook and our website as we all work through this challenge together.



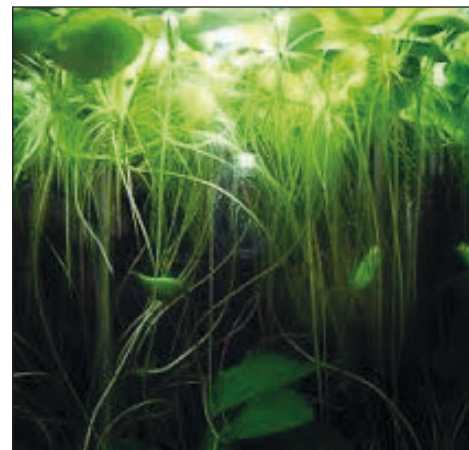
Glossy Ibis courtesy of David Sibley

Saving Starr Pond

by Alan Biggs

In January, a team of volunteers assembled at Pinckney Island National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) to address some of the avian habitat issues at Starr Pond. The volunteers were led by Gayle Sitter, who has donated his time in residence at Pinckney to improving Starr Pond and Ibis Pond and upgrading nesting sites on the refuge. Several HH Audubon volunteers as well as members of the Friends of the Savannah Coastal Wildlife Refuges participated in this meeting and have been working closely with Gayle since then.

The main issue at Starr Pond is a population explosion of the native, emergent weed Frog's-Bit (also called American



Frog's-Bit

Sponge Plant, *Limnobium spongia*) that covered the water at such high density as to allow predators access to the two islands that are used by nesting wading birds. A secondary issue is that the water level cannot be controlled there, so rainfall fluctuations resulted in the death of woody vegetation around the pond circumference. The latter issue was easily addressed by providing a drainage ditch at the far end of the pond (on the left as you look at the pond from the road).

Strategies to address the Frog's-Bit issue began in late February with manual removal of the weed in areas around the Wood Duck nesting boxes. Several workdays were devoted to testing and implementing some manual removal techniques (rakes, grappling hooks) to provide clearings around the duck boxes and entry points for boat access, enabling workers to clean the duck boxes and access the islands for planting Bald Cypress trees.

When this preliminary work was completed, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists contracted for an aquatic plant-harvesting machine to start weed removal on a larger scale, with the goal being to create a wide weed-free zone

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President's Message

It has been almost a month since my knee surgery. My strategies for bird watching while home bound have mostly paid off. But despite massive leaf drop from our oak trees, no spring migrants have been spotted as I sit on the deck. I'm happy to report the number of winter and year-round bird species seen from our yard is now up to 52, including a new "yard" bird, the White Pelican. While it didn't actually land in our yard, I saw it while seated in my living room, so it counts as far as I am concerned.



With my term as President about to expire, it's time to write my last President's Message. I hope you share my belief that over the past two years, Hilton Head Audubon has become an even better organization, more impassioned in its advocacy for birds and the environment, more far-reaching in its efforts to educate and engage and improved in its communications, all the while continuing to offer quality field trips and worthwhile programs and conducting a world-class Christmas Bird Count. Thanks to grant writers, generous donors and a much needed increase in dues, we are on firm fiscal footing. Newhall Preserve has bounced back from the devastation of Hurricane Matthew and is welcoming more and more visitors to the sanctuary.

In 2019, we embarked on a five-year strategic plan to strengthen and grow the organization. Always keeping our vision and mission in mind, our team has progressed, making Hilton Head Audubon a leading voice for conservation in the Lowcountry.

I, and our membership in general, owe a huge debt of gratitude to our many volunteers. I want to start by thanking everyone who is a member, but our Board Members deserve an extra round of applause. Audubon has been fortunate to have committed and qualified people who are willing to give time, expertise and often funds to help us attain our goals. It is through the vision and efforts of our entire team that we are making great strides.

Kudos in particular go out to:

The entire Newhall team, led by Chairman Bob Clemens and so ably assisted by Vice Chairs Rita Kernan, Tom Hennessey and Matt Mattoon as well as board members Lynn Hodgson and Jack Coleman.

Our membership team, first run so well by long-time board members Fran Baer and Carol Clemens and now by Marina Bloomfield (who also serves as our webmaster and IT support), has performed flawlessly, ably serving our member community and shepherding our growth.

Our communications department, where Vice President John Bloomfield, *Ecobon* editor and webmaster Marina Bloomfield, and co-editor Sean Dennis of Wild Birds Unlimited, have been hard at work getting our messages out. Thanks also to Joan Wilson and Miho Kinnas, who coordinated communications for many years.

Alan Biggs has been a stalwart for our monthly programs, managing speaker logistics and keeping our meetings running smoothly. For many years, until health concerns forced her to resign, the duties

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News from Newhall

Audubon-Rotary Workday

This year is off to a wonderful start for the Audubon Newhall Preserve. On March 7, we hosted a workday with the local Rotary to rebuild our Pollinator Garden (formerly "Rita's Butterfly Garden").

Depleted soil was excavated from the garden at the rear of the Audubon Pond and replaced with rich topsoil donated by Mike Jukofsky of MAJ Enterprises. Mike brought his Bobcat and rented a trencher for us, so we could run an electrical line to supply power for the garden's irrigation pump. Mike's employees operated the equipment and made quick work of the projects needed to re-establish the garden.

Later, Matt Matoon and Bob Clemens hooked up a 5,000 gallon-per-hour pump, timer, and hoses to drip lines for irrigating the garden. Now we await the planting of the pollinator plants, and then the garden will flourish.

Newhall Vice-Chair Rita Kernan coordinated the workday. She expressed thanks to Hilton Head Rotarian Don Brashears "for the early coordination of this humongous work project and to every volunteer from Rotary and Audubon who not only worked fast and hard for the short time we had, but worked smart."

Rita expressed special thanks and a warm welcome to Audubon volunteers Mark Phifer, Mary Ellen Blankenship, and Steve Fishman.

"Mary Ellen not only snapped off all the unsightly spent dog-fennel along the Newhall Trail, but stacked it neatly to be easily picked up by CSA," said Rita. "Mark, at exactly 0900, plunged his shovel into the garden site and the dirt began flying. Next time I saw him, he was on his knees pulling out deep roots. Steve, a



wiry guy, was moving fast and furious along the trench, shovel and wet mud flying."

Thanks to our Visitors

Through mid-March the Preserve hosted no fewer than 400 visitors from 34 states and 10 foreign countries and Canadian provinces. Visitor comments were invariably positive, such as "Lovely," "Great trails," "Beautiful," and "Thank You!" We appreciate the local Rotary, our Board Members, our Trail Monitors, and our countless volunteers who make the Preserve such a special place. Although our work continues, guided walks have been suspended as a precaution to limit COVID-19 exposure. Watch the website for updates on our activities at the Preserve.



Notes From The Field

by Bob Speare
Audubon Field Trip Coordinator

Got the Pandemic Birding Blues?

We have you covered!

During the coronavirus health crisis, we understand that many of our members will be anxious about venturing out to bird, especially with others. We encourage our members to be safe and smart, practice social distancing, keep hands clean at all times and – importantly – not share equipment such as spotting scopes.

Read below for a recap of our last outing as well as a creative idea to keep members engaged while our trips are on hiatus.

March Field Trip to the Mobley Tract at the Port Royal Sound Foundation Maritime Center

On Saturday, March 7, we visited the Port Royal Sound Maritime Center and their Mobley Tract, which lies across the street from the main center. Juliana Smith from the Coastal Conservation League and Jake Zadik from the Charleston County Parks were our leaders for the day. And what a day it was! Between Hilton Head Audubon and Coastal Conservation League members, we had about 30 people enjoy the morning at this special location that was preserved with funds from the Beaufort County Open Lands Trust.

And the birds showed up as well: we tallied 41 species, including looks at young Bald Eagle chicks, several Hermit Thrushes, five warbler species including a Black-and-white, several flocks of Cedar Waxwings, a very cooperative Blue-headed Vireo, and a Eurasian Collared-Dove. Thanks to Juliana and Jake for leading, as well as the folks at the Maritime Center for hosting this wonderful March bird walk.

New April Member-wide Birding Activity

Pandemic Backyard Bird Counts

When: Saturdays, April 11 and April 25

Time: Anytime Between Midnight and 11:59 PM

Where: In Your Backyard

Leader: You

Fees: None

Since many of us are sticking close to home over the next few weeks, how can we witness some of the exciting bird arrivals and migrations taking place here in the Hilton Head area? Enter the April Pandemic Backyard Bird Counts.

This is a perfect opportunity for us to observe some of the changes happening in and around our own backyards. Here's how this works:

- Count any bird species you can see or hear from your yard — birds outside of your yard count too, as long as your feet are in your yard.
- Spend as much time as you'd like keeping track of the number of bird species you encounter on these two dates.
- Only count a bird species once per date, since we're interested in the total number of species encountered on each date.

At the end of each of those dates, send in your species list to hiaudubon@hiltonheadaudubon.org (*please copy and paste into your email program*). I will tally all the species and we'll post them on our website and Facebook page. If you are a photographer, we'd love to get captures of your best backyard birds.

It will be great to see just how many species are seen in our areas throughout this time, even if we're birding together — virtually!

Other Birding Programs

As of right now, we are not offering any additional bird walks or other birding programs, but will keep you informed as that changes. This means that our Tuesday Bird Walks at Newhall Preserve have been **cancelled** until further notice.

Interesting Bird Sightings

Even through these times when we will not be holding birding trips, we'd like to keep you up to date on interesting sightings we learn about throughout the area, in case you'd like to venture out on your own. As reports come in, we'll post them on our website and Facebook



Eastern Bluebird courtesy of David Sibley

President's message continued from page 1

of finding quality speakers fell to Kathy Greider and we thank her for her service.

We are going to be hard-pressed to replace our Field Trip Chair, Bob Speare. Bob's vision reaches far beyond the planning of bird outings, and his knowledge has had a great impact on decisions made by our board. We are fortunate that Bob will continue leading our popular Birding 101 series and will provide strategic advice on a number of important projects, such as our planned installation of the Motus tower.

Conservation, led by Jack Coleman, has taken on a number of key projects, the Pinckney Island NWR's Starr Pond's restoration being one of the most important. Amazing work by Jack and his team!

Never have I seen our education program so active. Lois Lewis has headed a dynamite team that managed to reach more than 900 school children, not only with the Great Backyard Bird Count but also on the Christmas Bird Count and the Outside Foundation's Kids in Kayaks program. I am so proud of Lois and her team.

Our Christmas Bird Count (CBC) continues to grow and flourish and is an exemplary model for citizen science and community involvement. Our CBC is one of the largest and best organized in the country and has been recognized nationally for its success. We have Susan Murphy to thank for the months of planning and

hard work required to bring it all together. Hats off to all of the area captains for their hard work as well.

As with many organizations, Audubon has people behind the scenes who keep our operations running smoothly. This includes two officers on our board, Secretary and Treasurer. Pauline Jones served as our Treasurer for many years and helped guide our way as we transitioned to a new-to-the-board President and Vice President. Since Pauline stepped off the board last year, Wendy Dickes moved from Secretary to fill her spot. Treasurer takes the skill and patience most of us do not possess. Both Wendy and Pauline's work is so much appreciated. Lynn Hodgson has ably succeeded Wendy as Secretary, even though she would much rather be out in the field watching birds. Lynn has been doing double duty for us, leading our Tuesday morning Newhall bird walks.

I have just touched on a few of the jobs and people that have made the last two years a success. As you can see, the adage about it takes a village is true. Lest I forget, the most helpful villager of all, Vice President John Bloomfield, has been a wealth of wisdom and ideas. Always willing to listen and consult, never once has he seemed put out with all of my calls and questions. So, thanks to everyone for two memorable years; I hope to still serve Audubon in the years to come and know we are on the right path for future growth and influence.

Jane

Starr Pond continued

that would encircle the two islands. This work began on March 3 and has continued with funding from the Friends group, local donations and donations from our own Audubon members. Video of the machine at work can be viewed on our Facebook page.

The rehabilitation of Starr Pond will take several years of continued effort as the weed is prolific and not easily eliminated. Several management options are being discussed, including continued physical and mechanical removal and possible spot treatments with targeted herbicides.

The Pinckney Island NWR is a gem in the National Wildlife Refuge system, and we are blessed to have it within a short ride from many of our homes. Hilton Head Audubon is committed to the rehabilitation work now underway. Please do your part either as a volunteer or by making a financial commitment to the [Friends of the Savannah Coastal Wildlife Refuges](#). When contributing, please designate Frog's-Bit.



Through Our Binoculars

by Jack Colcolough

As the weather warms in late March and early April, birders are saying goodbye for now to our overwintering ducks and hello to new sounds coming from the woods, most notably the song of our newly arrived Northern Parulas. Ten warbler species have already been reported, including Wilson's and Hooded Warblers, Northern Waterthrush and American Redstart. A rare Whooping Crane was reported by a birder at the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge, which, if confirmed, shows that anything is possible in the spring. Here's a run-down of recent reports:

Rare species

- Common Goldeneye
- Wilson's Warbler



Common Goldeneye by Judy Glazer

- Rough-tailed Hawk
- Yellow-breasted Chat
- Ash-throated Flycatcher (continuing at Sea Pines Forest Preserve)
- Scarlet Tanager (also at Sea Pines)



Snow Goose by Steven Guy



*Orange-crowned Warbler
by Alan Biggs*

- Hooded Warbler (Port Royal Plantation)
- Snow Goose (Bluffton)
- Many Ruby-throated Hummingbirds

Uncommon Species

- Baltimore Oriole
- American Kestrel
- Merlin
- Orange-crowned Warbler
- Glossy Ibis
- Black-necked Stilt
- Red-cockaded Woodpecker
- Hairy Woodpecker
- House Wren
- Winter Wren
- Rusty Blackbird
- Loggerhead Shrike
- Caspian Tern
- Blue-headed Vireo
- Mottled Duck
- Red-throated Loon
- Sharp-shinned Hawk
- White-breasted Nuthatch
- Field Sparrow

Common or Good Finds (including early arrivals)

- Great Crested Flycatcher
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird
- Wilson's Snipe
- Northern Gannet
- Summer Tanager
- Hermit Thrush

Welcome New Member

- American Robin
- American Goldfinch
- Common Loon

We're also seeing many Ospreys on their nests and Bald Eagles rearing their young.

The outdoors can be great therapy for the blues many of us are suffering due to the coronavirus outbreak. It's a great time of year for birding – but when you go outside, remember to practice good hygiene, including washing and sanitizing your hands as well as appropriate social distancing if you are in a small group.

Thanks to all for reporting your sightings!



A warm welcome to our new member:

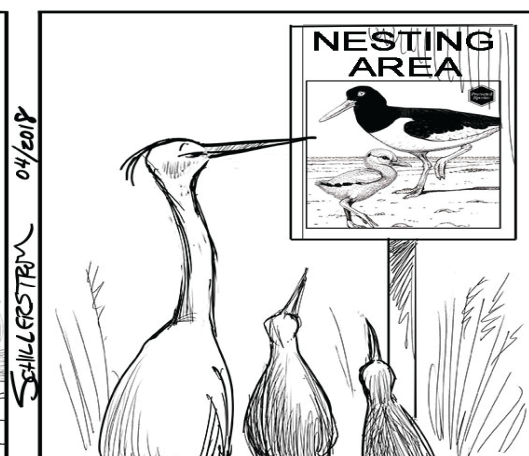
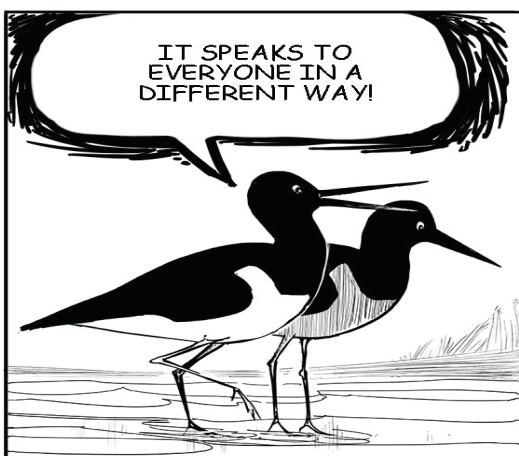
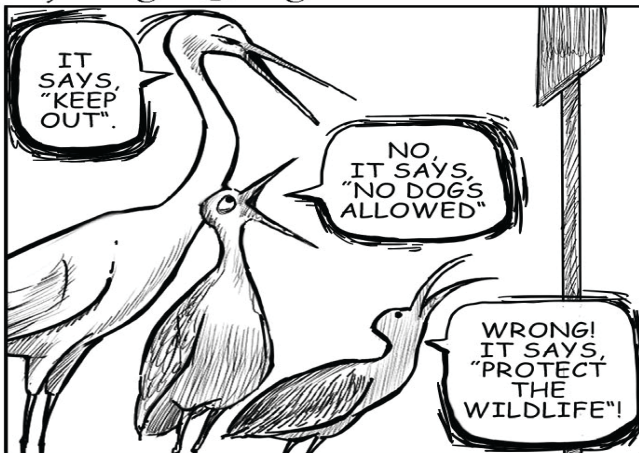
Steven Guy

Members and non-members can join, renew or make donations on our website. We accept Visa, Mastercard or Discover. An email will be sent when your membership is due. You may choose to pay online through our secure portal or mail in a check (the website has a form for you to fill out and mail with your check). Please do not mail in a check without the form. We continually update our records and want to make sure you're receiving our emails and *The Ecobon*. If you have any questions about membership, please email:

hhiaudubon@hiltonheadaudubon.org
(please copy and paste into your email program)

Audubon Mots

by: Roger@RogerSchillerstrom.com



A Note From Our Friends at Wild Birds

All the news and concerns about COVID-19 coronavirus has created uncertainty about things we often take for granted and placed events we were looking forward to on hold. Yet the birds and nature in general are here for us — and that's a wonderful thing! Watching birds is a proven stress-reliever, and sunshine and fresh air are vital to good health.

If you have concerns about being out in public spaces right now but are in need of food or supplies for your backyard birds, we are happy to take your order with a credit card over the phone (843-802-2010) and then bring your purchases out to the car when you come by and park curbside. If you call when we are helping customers in the store, please leave your name and phone number (but not your credit card info) and we will call you back as soon as we can. As of now, we are maintaining our normal business hours (Monday-Saturday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Sunday noon to 5 p.m.).

Please be careful and do everything necessary to stay in good health and spirits. Thank you for feeding the birds and for supporting a locally owned and operated business.

Julia and Sean Dennis



- Bird Seed, Blends & Suet
- Bird Feeders & Houses
- Mounting Hardware
- Birdbaths & Accessories
- Binoculars & Field Guides
- Nature Books & Gifts

Festival Centre at Indigo Park
45 Pembroke Dr., Suite 130
Hilton Head Island, SC 29926
843-802-2010
HiltonHeadWBU@yahoo.com

April - May 2020 Calendar

April 2020

Thursday, April 9 **HH Audubon Meeting - CANCELED**

Saturday, April 18 **April Field Trip - CANCELED**

May 2020

Thursday, May 21 **Hilton Head Audubon Member Picnic - CANCELED**

Monthly meetings of the Hilton Head Island Audubon Society are regularly scheduled at 3:00 pm on the second Thursday of each month, September through May. Members and guests welcome.