



Audubon | FLORIDA

Naturalist

Winter 2023





Heidi McCree, Board Chair

It is one of the great joys in my life that I work so closely with conservation champions across the State of Florida. I felt this deeply in October, when we came together for the first in-person Assembly since 2019, spotting birds, celebrating wins, and discussing important tools for protecting birds and natural resources. I know I left with renewed hope and enthusiasm for both Audubon Florida’s work as well as the substantial efforts of the 45 chapters in our Sunshine State network.

Assembly was, however, bittersweet, as we keenly felt the absence of two board members who passed away this summer. Ann Harwood-Nuss and Scott Taylor dedicated their time, expertise, and gifts to Audubon Florida and the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey to create a better future for birds and the people who love them. We will dearly miss their keen intellect, their vision for the future, and their participation on our board.



Ann Harwood-Nuss



Scott Taylor

We strive to honor their memory with our efforts in the coming years.

Heidi McCree, Board Chair, Audubon Florida



Julie Wraithmell, Executive Director

For me, 2023 was defined by big things. A big hurricane, a big flamingo invasion, and big budget investments into conservation and Everglades restoration. Big things are important. We need big wildlife corridors for species like the Florida panther and Florida black bear to survive and thrive. We need big Everglades restoration projects to bring more water into the River of Grass,

creating a healthier future for both birds and people. We need a big environmental movement, with people from all backgrounds, regions, and experiences advocating for wildlife and the places they need.

But we need the “little” things too—the individual actions that we do day in and day out to build a more resilient future for Florida’s special places. We need birders to call in their flamingo sightings so we can track their movements (pg. 5); we need city staff to use greenhouse gas inventories to jumpstart initiatives to move to renewable energy (pg. 4); we need college students excited and inspired to enter the conservation field after graduation (pg. 11).

To be honest, these things aren’t “little” at all. By making these efforts part of our daily lives, we build upon each other’s successes. We quite literally flock together! Thank you for all you do. I wish you and yours a bright year of birding ahead.

Julie Wraithmell, Executive Director, Audubon Florida

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Cover:

American Flamingos in Tampa Bay.

Photo: Jeff Liechty/

Audubon Florida

When Hurricanes and Coastal Construction Alter Bird Habitat – How Do They Fare?

For sea, shore, and wading birds along Florida’s coastline, breeding and foraging habitat is tightly linked to their ability to successfully raise their families. What is foraging habitat? Put simply, it’s the areas where these birds find their food. Coastlines are dynamic areas, and in 2023 we saw firsthand how changing shorelines are impacting some of Florida’s most vulnerable birds, from the diminutive Snowy Plovers to the theatrical Reddish Egrets.

HURRICANES

“Hurricanes have a large impact on bird habitat, but not in the way you might think,” explains Audrey DeRose-Wilson, director of bird conservation for Audubon Florida.

Coastal birds are adapted to hurricanes and actually benefit from overwash events that create new, open, sandy habitat. When a storm strips a beach of vegetation or covers that vegetation with sand, these newly disturbed areas become prime nesting sites for plovers, terns, and skimmers. Moreover, storms open inlets and create intertidal habitat that is perfect for shorebirds to forage for food, further boosting their opportunities for a successful nesting season.

After 2018’s Hurricane Michael hit the Florida Panhandle, for example, sea and shorebirds hatched more chicks than in previous years. Similarly, we saw high numbers of Snowy Plover, Least Tern, and Black Skimmer nesting pairs in Southwest Florida after 2022’s Hurricane Ian. They not only hatched more chicks, but these chicks successfully fledged, and will hopefully return once they’ve matured to hatch chicks of their own.

“After a storm, habitat changes are often viewed as destruction,” DeRose-Wilson continues. “We know it certainly feels that way for local communities, and our hearts go out to them as they seek to rebuild in the wake of a hurricane. But for birds, it’s different. They need storms to maintain the habitat they need to survive long term.”

LONG-TERM COASTAL CHANGES

Unfortunately, in a rush to rebuild after a storm, or by annually maintaining dredged channels or hardened shorelines, people are reducing critical foraging habitat



Snowy Plovers benefit from overwashed habitat. More than 14 Snowy Plover chicks fledged this year from Lee County! Photo: Jamey Binneveld

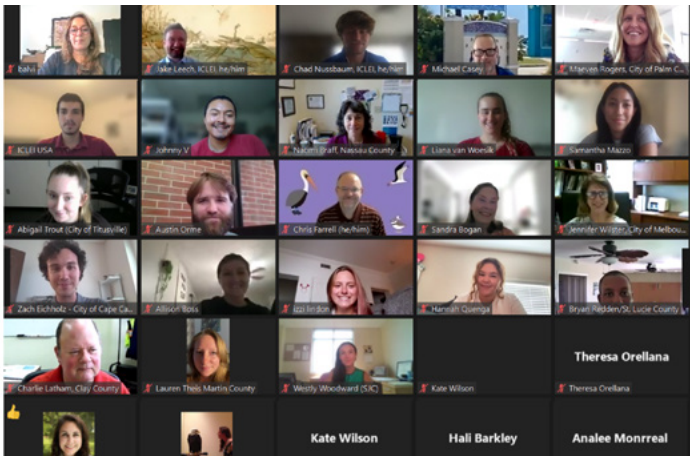
for some of Florida’s most iconic species. In the Tampa Bay region, breeding Reddish Egret pairs are down by more than 70% in the past twenty years. While nesting habitat remains, they don’t have enough shallow areas to successfully hunt for food. Popular sites for beachgoers in the summer months further shrink available foraging areas. Reddish Egrets need these shallow depths to actively hunt for enough small fish to feed hungry chicks. Sea level rise will only exacerbate these problems, as the foraging habitat that exists becomes deeper while hardened seawalls prevent new shallow areas from forming.

WHAT AUDUBON DOES TO HELP THE BIRDS

Even if the perfect breeding and foraging habitat exists, birds today must contend with disturbance from people, pets, and predators like coyotes and crows. Audubon works at more than 300 coastal sites across the Sunshine State to educate beachgoers about how to protect these birds, while coordinating with local wildlife agencies and staff to reduce predation on already vulnerable nesting birds. In Tampa, Audubon is constructing offshore breakwaters that create calm-water foraging areas and slow the loss of shallow water habitat. We work with partners to protect existing feeding areas and seek opportunities to create new foraging habitats, including establishing Critical Wildlife Areas, pushing for beneficial use of dredge material, and reducing human disturbance.

**Do you want to join our volunteer flock?
Click here for more information.**

College Students and Local Governments Develop Job Skills and Greenhouse Gas Baselines in Third Audubon Partnership



Students and their counterparts at cities and counties met regularly to develop GHG inventories in East Florida.

This summer, Audubon Florida proudly introduced the Fall 2023 East Florida Greenhouse Gas Cohort, marking the third iteration of this impactful initiative. In collaboration with ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability and made possible by the generous support of Wells Fargo, this program brings together students from Florida universities and municipal and county government staff to craft greenhouse gas (GHG) inventories for government operations.

Data collected by the cohort includes government energy usage, solid waste and wastewater, fleet vehicle operations, and staff commutes. The GHG inventories generated through this program empower cities and counties to analyze the extent of their emissions, formulate effective reduction plans, and contribute meaningfully to climate change mitigation. This transparency not only fosters accountability to taxpayers but also serves as a metric for evaluating the efficacy of implemented policies.

This year's cohort paired 13 students from Indian River State College, Florida Institute of Technology, Flagler College, Stetson University, and the University of Florida with 13 east Florida city and county governments to bring the inventories to fruition. Following the completion of the inventories, students and staff will work in tandem to analyze results, explore reduction strategies, and establish achievable goals.

Audubon Florida pioneered this collaborative initiative in 2021 with the Audubon Florida + East Florida Regional Resilience Collaborative (AF + R2C) Cohort,

and the success of this model led to the replication of the cohort in the Tampa Bay region in 2022 and east Florida again in 2023. Collectively, we've now worked with 43 municipalities and student pairs from seven schools. Audubon Florida remains committed to building upon the achievements of its cohort alumni, fostering ongoing collaborations as climate action planning progresses and evolves.

The Fall 2023 East Florida Greenhouse Gas Cohort stands as a testament to our ongoing commitment to fostering collaboration between students and local governments in the pursuit of sustainable practices and climate action. As these inventive partnerships continue to evolve and make strides towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions, Audubon Florida remains at the forefront of initiatives that not only educate the next generation but also actively contribute to environmental stewardship.



An American Flamingo spotted in the Florida Panhandle.
Photo: Brian Cammarano/Audubon Florida

Flamingos Flock to Florida After Hurricane Idalia

Hurricane Idalia, which struck Florida's Big Bend at the end of August, blew in a pink wave of American Flamingos. Caught while on the move between Cuba and the Yucatan, the flamingos touched down across Florida and the eastern half of the United States, from Texas and Louisiana all the way to Wisconsin and Pennsylvania.

State Research Director Jerry Lorenz, PhD, tracks the sightings.

"This event is unprecedented," he explains, "We're talking more than 100 flamingos here. Will they stay? Will they leave? We want to know."

American Flamingos used to breed in Florida, but were nearly eliminated by hunters for their feathers. Destruction of Everglades habitat further drove them from South Florida.

Birds tell us if their habitat is healthy. If flamingos that remain in Florida are able to find enough food and intact wetlands to survive, it is a sign that ongoing conservation and restoration initiatives in South Florida and beyond are creating a more resilient future for these iconic pink birds.

"If we get the water right, our future could be pink," says Director of Everglades Policy Kelly Cox. "Everglades restoration is our best chance at creating a healthy environment where flamingos can thrive."



Photo: James Fillmore/Audubon Photography Awards

WE NEED YOUR HELP

Are you still seeing flamingos in the wild? We want to know! If you've seen flamingos before, are they still there? Have they arrived in new locations? Log your sightings on eBird or send them to us at flconservation@audubon.org.

Reflecting on Land and Water Wins of 2023, Looking Ahead to 2024

CONSERVATION

The pace of successfully conserving lands important to wildlife and water resources in Florida increased markedly in 2023. Using higher conservation land and easement purchase funds provided by the Florida Legislature, the state acquired land and easements preserving more than 100,000 acres. That is 166 square miles of Florida that will never be developed, where birds and wildlife thrive, aquifers are recharged by rainfall, and water stored naturally in wetlands, lakes, and streams.

The properties purchased or placed under protective conservation easements include land vital to the Everglades and the Kissimmee River system, including more than 10,000 acres in the Fisheating Creek watershed, 17,000 acres in the Devils Garden Swamp in Hendry County, and 8,000 acres in the Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge; all places needed to assemble the Florida Wildlife Corridor. The protected properties span the entire geography of the state, with 12,000+ acres now in state ownership within the Telogia Creek watershed in Liberty County in Florida's Panhandle, and important sections of the Rainbow River and the Ocala National Forest in Marion County.

EVERGLADES RESTORATION

In 2023 we saw a landmark number of projects cross the finish line and more break ground.

- ✓ Taylor Slough Flow Improvements: Finished!
- ✓ CEPP North: Ground broken!
- ✓ Biscayne Bay Cutler Wetlands: Water flowing!
- ✓ EAA Reservoir: Ground broken ahead of schedule!

These accomplishments come from long-standing and consistent engagement by Audubon's Everglades team and partner organizations. Steady funding from both the federal and state government has fueled the pace of Everglades restoration.

STORMWATER

This time last year, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) put the finishing touches on a rule that would update the state's permitting programs to manage stormwater. The process began in June 2020 when Governor DeSantis signed SB 712 into law to require improvements to many state programs that

manage water quality and water supply. The successful passage of SB 1379 during the last legislative session—a DEP priority—outlined concrete actions to reduce nutrient pollution (primarily from wastewater) across the state, especially within identified restoration plans with a particular focus on Indian River Lagoon.

Now that Florida has regulatory updates addressing improvements to wastewater infrastructure, we must make similar updates to our stormwater permitting program. Florida's existing stormwater rules are more than forty years old and are simply not protective enough. The new stormwater rule adopted in May 2023 needs to be ratified.

In January 2024, our legislators must update Florida's 40-year-old stormwater rules, with more protective requirements to reduce algae-fueling nutrient runoff.

Development in Florida is at an all-time high; we must get this right. Make sure you are signed up for our Advocate newsletter to stay up-to-date on when we need your voice to improve Florida's stormwater and protect our coastlines from the scourge of algal blooms: fl.audubon.org/advocate.

FUNDING FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS

In December, Governor DeSantis unveiled his budget proposal for Fiscal Year 2024–2025, totaling \$114.4 billion. His recommendations include a groundbreaking \$1.1 billion for Everglades restoration and water quality improvements. As our state continues to prepare to brace against rising seas, the Governor's recommendations included \$157 million for resiliency programs and for protecting coral reefs, our first line of defense against storm surge. His budget also includes \$100 million for the Florida Forever land conservation program, as well as \$100 million for the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program to purchase conservation easements to protect natural resources and agricultural lands.



Audubon Florida Advocates for Migratory Bird Protections in Washington, D.C.


In October, Audubon Florida Executive Director Julie Wraithmell testified before a U.S. House Natural Resources subcommittee in support of legislation to expand funding for migratory birds and the places they need to survive. More than half of our nation's birds migrate to and from Latin America and the Caribbean. The bipartisan Migratory Birds of the Americas Conservation Enhancements Act would help invest in their habitats on a hemispheric scale. A snapshot of her testimony is below.

Millions of migratory birds annually pass through Florida, Washington, D.C., and communities across the United States during their fall migration.

These birds are undertaking awe-inspiring journeys from their nesting habitat throughout America. More than half of America's birds will fly to Latin America and the Caribbean to spend the winter, including hundreds of beloved species of birds such as orioles, hummingbirds, ducks, shorebirds, hawks, and many more. It's only normal for us to think of the birds of our everyday lives—the birds of our neighborhoods and communities—as our birds, belonging to that place. But in reality, many of them are only on loan to us, and in fact spend their lives in motion, washing like tides back and forth across the hemisphere.

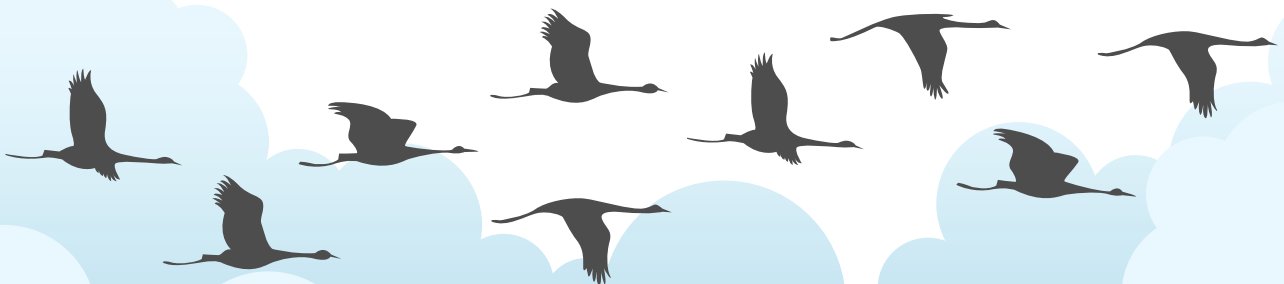
These lives in motion are made possible by a connected chain of habitats like stepping stones that birds have depended on for thousands of years. In Florida, we can do everything we can to protect the places “my” birds need in the state. But no matter how successful we are, the chain is only as strong as its weakest link. And if the links to Florida's south are failing, the birds we bid farewell to in the fall won't return to us again in spring.



 Audubon Florida Executive Director Julie Wraithmell testifies in front of a U.S. House Natural Resources Subcommittee to support the Migratory Birds of the Americas Conservation Enhancements Act. Photo: Sydney Walsh/Audubon

Recognizing the need for migratory bird conservation investments, Congress passed the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act in 2000. Since its inception, this program has provided essential conservation funding across the Americas, by catalyzing partnerships and investing in cost-effective projects to improve habitat conservation, promote bird-friendly land use and farming practices, advance research, and more. Since 2000, the program has supported more than 700 projects across 43 countries, benefitting more than 5 million acres of habitat. Of the \$89 million invested by the U.S., partners have brought an additional \$346 million to the table.

Audubon supports the Migratory Birds of the Americas Conservation Enhancements Act because it will help address several current needs and opportunities for migratory birds. The legislation will grow its authorized funding to meet the demand for the program and the needs of our declining bird populations. And it will improve the program's accessibility by amending the matching requirement, which has been identified as an obstacle for partners, especially for smaller organizations that do not have access to large funding resources.





Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary Gears Up for 70th Anniversary Celebration with Vision for the Future

Audubon's first involvement with Corkscrew Swamp began in the early 1900s, fielding wardens to protect nesting birds from poachers seeking their highly prized plumage. By the 1950s, however, a new threat had emerged—the old-growth, bald cypress forest faced imminent clear-cutting. Seventy years ago, brave voices in our community spoke up to protect ancient trees from the threat of the axe and saw. Thanks to their efforts, today we protect 13,000-plus acres in Southwest Florida as a haven for plants, animals, and people.

Since the first land purchase in 1954, Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary has become a leader in Southwest Florida conservation. The wetlands protected within the Sanctuary recharge the aquifer, clean storm water, and reduce risk of catastrophic wildfire while reducing algal blooms along the coastline.

From 1954 to today, Audubon staff at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary have built and continue to maintain an iconic 2.25-mile boardwalk that opens the door of this enchanting forest to thousands of locals and visitors. We bring more than 5,000 students to the Sanctuary every year to inspire a lifelong love and curiosity of the natural world. We are restoring more than 1,000 acres of wetland meadows for wading birds, alligators, fish, amphibians, panthers, and more, as well as for our neighbors, as the restored areas hold and clean water while reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

BUT WE NEED YOU FOR THE NEXT 70.

We are planning a visionary transformation of both our campus and our programs to meet challenges of the 21st century, including changing climate and increasing development.



Zeida Mendez



A Black-crowned Night-Heron thrives in a restored area within Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.
Photo: Zeida Cecilia-Mendez/Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary
Photographer in Residence

In fact, the work we do here at the Sanctuary not only improves the lives of our inland neighbors, but our coastal communities too. By pioneering restoration techniques to clean and hold more water on the landscape, we improve drinking water levels and reduce the scourge of algal blooms along our beaches and islands.

Built and operated for many years with the generosity of volunteers and grassroots donors, we must now strengthen our foundation. Audubon is making strategic investments in the Sanctuary's campus infrastructure that will improve our ability to deliver transformational programming, conduct the science needed to preserve our 13,000-plus acres, improve our ability to educate students and lifelong learners, and enhance the boardwalk experience that inspires every visitor to become a champion for this cherished place.

Click here to be part of the next 70 years at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, the heart of the Western Everglades.

Have you visited Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary?



Scan Here

Take an enchanting stroll down the 2.25-mile boardwalk into the heart of the Western Everglades.

📍 375 Sanctuary Road, Naples

Learn more and reserve tickets at corkscrew.audubon.org

The Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary boardwalk immerses visitors in an ancient bald-cypress forest.
Photo: Charlie MacDonald

Center for Birds of Prey Plays Key Role in Raptor Research

The Audubon Center for Birds of Prey sees nearly 800 raptors come through its Raptor Trauma Clinic each year. The victims of vehicle strikes, environmental toxins, and other human-wildlife conflict, babies that fall from their nests or become orphaned, and those with unexplained illnesses, all have a chance of survival in the capable hands of the clinic staff. But each patient also provides a goldmine of data for scientists to better understand raptors and their habitats, diets, threats, genetics, and much more.

The Center frequently collaborates with researchers from around the state, the country, and even the world to improve the field of raptor conservation. Many of these collaborations come from the nearby University of Central Florida (UCF), where researchers have used data from the Center to study the abundance of microplastics in the environment, the presence of different species of external parasites, and the bioaccumulation of heavy metals in the bodies of raptors, to name a few.

MICROPLASTICS

In 2018, UCF Department of Biology graduate Julia Carlin partnered with Audubon Raptor Conservation Specialist Sam Little to study the frequency of microplastics in the digestive tracts of native Central Florida raptors. The individuals studied were all nonmigratory, inland-dwelling birds that were either dead on arrival at the Raptor Trauma Clinic or died within 24 hours of arrival. The findings were astounding: All 63 birds examined had microplastics in their digestive systems, totaling more than 1,200 pieces of plastic. The study was the first to look at microplastics in raptors specifically — while fish and seabirds are well studied, the protected status of many raptor species makes it difficult to study them. The Audubon Center for Birds of Prey holds all necessary permits to perform and participate in research. Read Carlin's thesis here: bit.ly/47YwHoa.

HEAVY METALS

Another UCF graduate is working with the Center to find reliable, non-lethal sampling methods for detecting heavy metal pollutants in birds of prey. Starting in 2019, Jennifer Bouchenot focused her research on the blood feathers of Red-shouldered Hawks, hypothesizing that these feathers, which contain an active blood supply, could provide an accurate yet easily collectible sample of heavy metals in a bird's internal organs.

Retrieving samples from live birds allows scientists to view the birds as biomonitors, canaries in the coal mine of a polluted ecosystem. In the four years since her research began, Bouchenot continues to pursue more accurate, less invasive sampling methods: Her latest involves a device used to detect heavy metals in soil. Read Bouchenot's thesis here: bit.ly/46ZzRqD.

The Center for Birds of Prey is well known for its rehabilitation program, but the research happening here has implications beyond any individual bird. In working with researchers across the country and within Central Florida, the Audubon team makes the most of these opportunities to advance raptor science, benefitting these species long into the future.



Exciting news! Connick, the Bald Eagle that fell from his nest on a popular Captiva Island nest camera, has found a permanent home at the Smithsonian's National Zoo in Washington, D.C. Connick came to the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in April 2023 and was unable to be released back to the wild due to a genetic feather condition. Connick will serve as an ambassador for Bald Eagles in the nation's capital and is slated to appear in his new exhibit in 2024.



Thank you to the Orlando Utilities Commission—The Reliable One—for their support of the Center for Birds of Prey and native Florida raptors.

CLI Program Launches New Year at Audubon Florida Assembly

Every fall, the Conservation Leadership Initiative (CLI) welcomes 25 Florida college students and 25 Audubon chapter mentors. Since 2020, the program has been launched remotely or in small regional groups due to the pandemic and Hurricane Ian. But after three years away, Audubon Florida's Conservation Leadership Initiative was finally able to launch in-person at Audubon Assembly!

CLI inspires the next generation of environmental leaders through building relationships, networking, and creating experiential learning opportunities. Our chapter mentors volunteer their time to immerse students into local chapter initiatives and the conservation community while CLI staff work to connect students to Audubon's statewide and national programs through career panels, professional development webinars, and field experiences. This year's class represents 11 different Florida colleges and 17 local Audubon chapters, spread across the state from Pensacola to Miami.

Assembly kicked off for CLI students with a meet-and-greet session to use their new Vortex binoculars as they explored Nature's Classroom, Hillsborough County's outdoor environmental education center. The next day, the entire CLI class and their mentors met for the first time, followed by exclusive birding field trips. Students then attended tailored programming, which included a career panel and professional development workshop before they rejoined the Audubon Assembly for learning sessions, speakers, chapter celebrations, and networking.



CLI students attend a field trip as part of the Audubon Florida Assembly.



“The Audubon assembly was wonderful! I got to meet and connect with lots of incredible Audubon staff and conservationists. I got to learn what it truly means to be part of the Audubon Society!”
— 2023-2024 Student Alexandra Barath, University of Central Florida

Audubon Assembly is just the beginning for the CLI Class of 2023-24. Through May 2024, CLI students and mentors will collaborate within their chapters and the Audubon network to find meaningful ways for the students to get involved in Audubon activities, including student-led projects.

We thank Vortex Optics for their fourth year of binocular donations, allowing our students to become instant birders upon joining the program.

After three years away, Audubon Florida's Conservation Leadership Initiative was finally able to launch in person at Audubon Assembly.

Audubon Florida Recognizes Conservation Leaders for 2023

Audubon Florida recently honored five conservation leaders as part of its annual Assembly event on October 26-28, 2023.

The **Guy Bradley Award** recognizes an individual for stewardship in the face of threats to birds and their habitats and a relentless commitment to conserving Florida's wildlife. Audubon selected **Janell Brush** to receive this year's award for her outstanding dedication to the protection of Florida's shorebirds and seabirds and their habitats. As an avian research biologist for the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission, Brush's commitment is demonstrated through her more than 20 years of leading avian research and conservation projects in Florida. Her impact on bird conservation in Florida is epitomized in her leadership role in launching the Florida Shorebird Program, which is recognized well beyond the Sunshine State for its success in engaging local partnerships and using data-informed management to drive cost-effective recovery of the focal species.

The **Everglades Champion Award** is given for bold action on behalf of the Everglades or continuous leadership on behalf of Everglades restoration and the recovery of Lake Okeechobee and its estuaries. **Mark Cook, PhD**, was named Everglades Champion for 2023. As section leader of the Systemwide Everglades Research Group with the South Florida Water Management District, Dr. Cook's work as an avian ecologist and scientist has informed important water management and restoration decisions for the benefit of the Greater Everglades Ecosystem for more than 20 years.

The **Special Places Award** is given to someone who makes an extraordinary effort to protect the places that make Florida special. Audubon chose **Joe Earl Collins, II**, for the 2023 award. Collins worked as an agricultural engineer for 32 years and was senior vice president for Lykes Brothers, Inc. where his vision for wetland-friendly agricultural operations set a standard for environmental stewardship for the larger agricultural community. His award was received posthumously by family members.



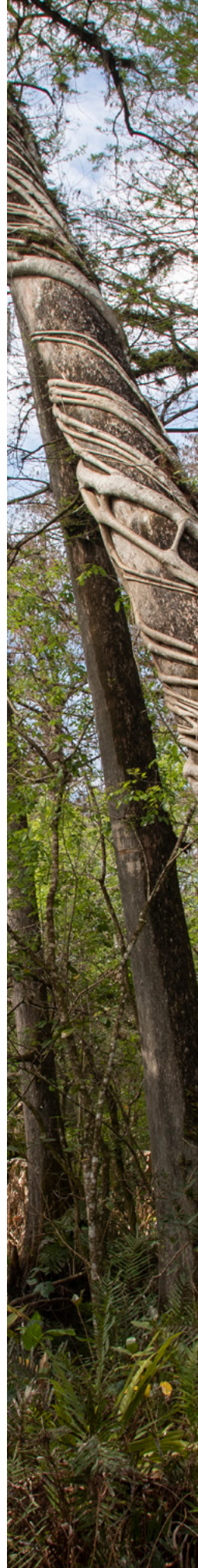
Guy Bradley Award Winner Janell Brush (right) pictured with Audubon Florida Director of Bird Conservation Audrey DeRose-Wilson.



2023 Everglades Champion Mark Cook, PhD, pictured at right with Audubon Florida Director of Everglades Policy Kelly Cox.



Eli Collins and Katie Everett, the son and niece of Special Places Award Winner Joe Collins, accepted the posthumous recognition from Audubon Florida's Dr. Paul Gray.





The **Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award** is given to an officer who has demonstrated that protecting wildlife is more than a job, but a moral obligation, and has made significant contributions to protecting Florida's wildlife either within or above the course of their regular duty. This year's award went to **Lt. Michael Bibeau** with the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission. Lt. Bibeau has played an important role in ensuring shorebird protection on Pinellas County beaches during busy holidays. Over the past two summers, he had officers stationed at all sites with active breeding birds to enforce protections and support volunteer bird stewards.

The **Volunteer of the Year Award** is given to an individual who has a history of exhibiting exemplary dedication to birds and the places they need and who consistently goes above and beyond in their service to conservation. This year's award went to **Wendy Meehan**. Meehan has been a shorebird steward and rooftop monitor for more than 17 years in the Tampa Bay area, where she became involved in the St. Petersburg Audubon Society. In recent few years, Meehan also embraced rooftop monitoring opportunities and assisted Audubon staff with resighting banded birds of many species, providing valuable data on an almost daily basis to avian researchers.



Audubon Florida's Shorebird Manager Holley Short recognized FWC's Lt. Michael Bibeau with 2023's *Law Enforcement Officer of the Year*.



Audubon Florida's Rooftop Biologist Kara Cook recognized St. Petersburg's Wendy Meehan (right) as our 2023 *Volunteer of the Year*.

Mark your calendars!

The 2024 Audubon Florida Assembly will be held
November 7-9 in Daytona Beach.



▲ Venice Area Audubon Society (left) and Pelican Island Audubon Society (right) earned awards for their children's programming.

Audubon Florida Honors Local Chapters, Projects at 2023 Chapter Celebration

Each year, Audubon Florida recognizes local conservation wins achieved by members across the Sunshine State. This year, seven awards were presented during the chapter celebration at the annual Audubon Assembly on October 28. The awards, which recognize excellence in education and conservation, are nominated by the state's 45 chapters and selected by a committee of seven regional directors. Criteria for selection include the environmental significance of their projects, measurable impacts, partnerships, and more.

The **Best Conservation Award for a small chapter went to Hendry-Glades Audubon Society** for initiating a pilot program with Hendry Soil and Water Conservation District called "Native Plants for Pollinators" with the help of an Audubon Plants for Birds Grant funded by the Florida Power & Light Company. The program provides native pollinator plants and seeds to schools, landowners, homeowners, or parks to create garden plots that attract birds, bees, and butterflies. The program includes community educational outreach opportunities through demonstration gardens, field trips, and presentations.

The **Best Conservation Award for a large chapter went to Tropical Audubon Society** for their "Go-Native Plant Sale" project that takes place annually and aligns with National Audubon's Plants for Birds campaign. Their initiative increases native plants distributed into the community, which in turn supports local pollinators and biodiversity in the region. This year, Tropical Audubon purchased and sold 700 plants from four local native plant nurseries, raising \$10,000 to fund the chapter's conservation initiatives. The event engaged dozens of volunteers who set up information tables, signs, and games to educate hundreds of visitors on the importance of landscaping with native plants.

The **Best Education Award for a small chapter went to Venice Area Audubon Society** for their "Little Naturalists" program for children aged 3-5 years old. The program provides a guided, interactive opportunity for young children to engage in exploring their local environment and develop a lifelong appreciation and care for nature. Through this program, children hone their powers of observation and learn about wildlife while appreciating the important roles that animals play in the environment. The program takes place on Saturdays to allow children and parents/guardians to participate together.

The Best Education Award for a large chapter award was a tie between Pelican Island Audubon Society and Tropical Audubon Society.

Tropical Audubon Society was selected for this award based on their Tropical Audubon Ambassador Program (TAAP). TAAP is a free, civic engagement program for adults that promotes conservation by empowering a diverse and effective South Florida population to advocate for the region's natural ecosystems. The current program involves virtual sessions over an 11-week period, complemented by field trips and local experts. In 2022, more than 160 people registered for the program, and 90 participated in at least one session. Most notably, a record-breaking 61 ambassadors completed the entire program to earn a certificate.

Pelican Island Audubon Society was selected for this award based on their "Audubon Advocate" programs with four Title 1 elementary schools and summer camp program. New in 2023, Pelican Island Audubon held their first seasonal nature camps for the Children's Homeless Foundation of Indian River County. The program uses nature as a healing modality by connecting the children with the natural environment as well as introducing them to the need for conservation.

Southeast Volusia Audubon Society (SEVAS) was selected as the Small Chapter of the Year for the forging of new partnerships. In partnership with the fourth grade students and their science teacher at Chisolm Elementary School, they created a Plants for Birds garden complete with solar bird bath. They hosted several creative events, from featuring a local author to inviting students to build an owl nest which was actually mounted in a nearby tree. And, they gifted backpacks complete with binoculars, bird books, and insect ID materials for ongoing natural history education at the school.

Pelican Island Audubon Society was selected as the Large Chapter of the Year based on the quality, diversity, and sustainability of its many programs. Their decision to hire a full-time executive director in addition to their full-time educator reflects their commitment to education and engagement with non-traditional communities and their focus on combating climate change through their “Trees For Life” program. They not only raise trees in their greenhouse but have tracked the distribution of more than 18,000 native trees (all tracked on their website). Their Plants for Birds gardens have beautified the entrance to the Indian River County Commission Building and the UP from Poverty headquarters in Vero Beach, with more gardens in the works.

▼ (Chapter leaders) Left to right: Venice Area Audubon Society (Best Education - small chapter), Tropical Audubon Society (Best Education – large chapter), Tropical Audubon Society (Best Conservation – large chapter), Audubon Florida Chapters Conservation Manager Jacqui Sulek, Pelican Island Audubon Society (Best Education – large chapter), Pelican Island Audubon Society (Chapter of the Year – large chapter), Southeast Volusia Audubon Society (Chapter of the Year – small chapter), and Hendry-Glades Audubon Society (Best Conservation – small chapter).



Florida Chapter Members Win Callison and Dutcher Awards

Congratulations to Stephen Kintner from the West Volusia Audubon Society—winner of this year’s Callison Volunteer Award. Kintner is a leading force for his chapter in community building, community science, habitat management, and fundraising. He led the chapter’s growth in equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging, and implemented a paid chapter internship on two campuses. The Charles H. Callison Award, given by the National Audubon Society, honors outstanding efforts contributed by staff and volunteers to continue Audubon’s mission for birds and habitat conservation.



“Stephen not only has an extensive history with Audubon and conservation but a boundless enthusiasm for engaging people and building community. He is creative in planning projects and successful in funding them and could not be a better partner for Audubon Florida and the Audubon Jay Watch program.”
— Jacqui Sulek, Chapters Conservation Manager



A Florida college student was among the William Dutcher Awardees for 2023! Congratulations to Jordan Silvia of Audubon of Martin County. Nominated by Audubon’s state leadership, the National Audubon Society’s William Dutcher Award goes to outstanding Audubon chapter volunteer leaders who have worked creatively and intensively on one or more focus areas or projects to advance Audubon’s mission.



Jordan Silvia (middle) stands with Florida attendees at the National Audubon Society leadership conference in Colorado.

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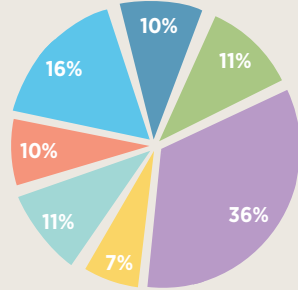
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AUDUBON FLORIDA & FLORIDA AUDUBON SOCIETY FINANCIALS JULY 1, 2022 – JUNE 30, 2023

AUDUBON FLORIDA EXPENSES BY PROGRAM

**TOTAL
EXPENSE
\$9,768,980**



\$936,053 Florida Operations Program

\$1,058,754 Public Policy

\$3,501,432 Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary

\$670,550 Everglades Conservation

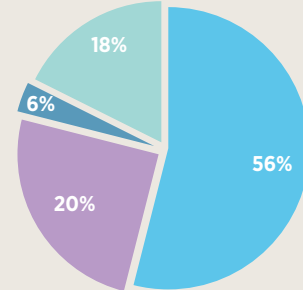
\$1,067,930 Everglades Science

\$943,961 Center for Birds of Prey

\$1,590,300 Coastal Stewardship

AUDUBON FLORIDA REVENUE SOURCES

**TOTAL
REVENUE
\$9,768,980**



\$5,511,285 Contributions & Bequests

\$1,929,405 Government Grants

\$594,025 Investments

\$1,734,265 Center Admissions & Other Revenue

FLORIDA AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC. STATEMENT OF ASSETS, LIABILITIES, & NET ASSETS AS OF JUNE 30, 2023

ASSETS

Current Assets

Cash	\$83,642
Cash - <i>Restricted</i>	\$19,494
Charles Schwab Investment	\$5,754,200
Charles Schwab Investment - <i>Restricted Geanagel</i>	\$1,206,838
Charles Schwab Investment - <i>Restricted VonBoroski</i>	\$411,101

Total Current Assets **\$7,475,275**

Other Assets

Land	\$2,578,510
Building & Improvements	\$2,270,834
Furniture & Equipment	\$44,459
Accumulated Depreciation	-\$1,495,176

Total Other Assets **\$3,398,627**

TOTAL ASSETS \$10,873,902

LIABILITIES & EQUITY

Liabilities **\$6,755**

Net Assets

Land-Preservation	\$503,612
Board Designated Acquisition Fund	\$3,336,177
Unrestricted Net Assets	\$5,645,059
Temporarily Restricted Net Assets	\$581,782
Permanent Restricted Net Assets	\$300,000
Net Income	\$500,517

Total Net Assets **\$10,867,147**

**TOTAL LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS
\$10,873,902**

It's a New Year—and it's Time to Get your Estate Plans in Order

To keep protecting Florida's iconic birds and habitats for decades to come, Audubon Florida launched *Elevate*, a campaign to make strategic investments that advance our science and habitat protection, and create new opportunities for immersive education experiences.

As part of this effort, we have included a goal to document \$10 million in future bequest gifts from supporters—and we are happy to share that we are halfway there!

We hope you will join us in this effort by including Audubon in your estate plans or by letting us know that you already have identified Audubon as a beneficiary of your estate. Gifts from retirement accounts, wills, and trusts have been an important part of Audubon's

history and are essential to our future. Please take this simple, but impactful, step to let us know about your plans or to refresh your information with us if you have already made this thoughtful commitment.

Legacy gifts like these fuel our work to protect birds and the places they need now and into the future.

Contact Suzanne Bartlett:

305.371.6399, ext. 123

Suzanne.Bartlett@audubon.org

Or fill out this form:

audubon.planyourlegacy.org/societyform.php

Looking for Ways to Double Your Impact in 2024?

If you are 70½ or older, you can make a tax-free distribution from your **traditional or Roth IRA** to Audubon Florida.

Here's how it works: you donate up to \$100,000 without incurring income tax on your withdrawal. The process is simple: you direct distributions in the amount of your choosing from your traditional or Roth IRA to Audubon Florida. This can be a one-time or recurring gift. The distributions go directly to Audubon Florida and are not subject to federal income tax.

When making your gift, to ensure it is properly processed and that you are listed as the donor of record and the gift comes to Florida, please have all checks directed to the address below and contact Suzanne Bartlett at 305.371.6399, ext. 123 or Suzanne.Bartlett@audubon.org to let us know to expect your gift.

**National Audubon Society
Office of Gift Planning
225 Varick Street, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10014**



Palm Warbler.

Photo: Gary Robinette/Audubon Photography Awards

4500 Biscayne Boulevard, Suite 350, Miami, Florida 33137
Tel: 305-371-6399 | fl.audubon.org

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Reddish Egret.
Photo: Preeti Desai/Audubon



We protect birds and the places they need.

Audubon works throughout the state using science, advocacy, education, and on-the-ground conservation.

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Audubon's efforts depend on you. Learn more about giving by contacting Victoria Johnston at victoria.johnston@audubon.org