



Black-bellied Whistling Ducks. Photo: Marti Phillips/Audubon Photography Awards

## Disappointing Budget Numbers for Florida Forever Conservation Program

The Florida Senate and House have finally come together to approve a budget. To be frank, the Florida Forever budget allocation is a betrayal of a conservation program supported by the overwhelming majority of Floridians. The final budget includes no funding for Florida Forever, the state's premier land conservation program responsible for protecting future state parks, state forests, wildlife habitat, and critical water resources. Even worse, the budget sweeps existing Florida Forever funds into the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program (RFLPP).

While Audubon has long supported RFLPP as an important and valuable component of Florida's broader conservation strategy — protecting working farms and ranches through conservation easements — Florida leaders historically recognized that both programs are essential because they serve different purposes in preserving the lands and waters that define our state. Florida Forever protects irreplaceable natural landscapes from development, while RFLPP helps sustain agricultural lands and rural heritage. One cannot replace the other.

By pitting these programs against each other, the Legislature has broken faith with the people of Florida and abandoned a longstanding bipartisan commitment to balanced conservation. Audubon is deeply alarmed by this outcome, and we thank our members and supporters who made their voices heard throughout budget negotiations.

We will continue working with elected officials, agency leaders, and conservation partners ahead of the next legislative session to ensure Floridians understand what is at stake. Protecting these lands is not only vital to our wildlife and natural heritage, but also to our economy, water quality, resilience, and quality of life for future generations.



Research Assistant Allie Mallouk (foreground) scans the water line as she and Wading Bird Specialist Shauna Sayers record birds at Sandy Key. Photo: Renée Wilson/Audubon Florida

## A Day in the Life: Bird Biologist at the Everglades Research Station

With a loud splash, Shauna Sayers drops the anchor, then plops the first kayak into the shallow waters around Sandy Key in Florida Bay. Sayers, a wading bird specialist at Audubon's Everglades Research Station in Tavernier, makes regular visits to this island and 62 other keys each spring to monitor the nesting efforts of wading birds. One species in particular, the Roseate Spoonbill, is targeted because it tells us about the health of the Everglades ecosystem.

[Read more.](#)



Hall manages the busy guest services window at the Center for Birds of Prey. Photo: Karina Jimenez/Audubon Florida.

## Phyllis Hall Mentors the Next Generation

It's a Friday morning at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey, and the phone rings at the guest relations desk. Volunteer Phyllis Hall answers, and her calm yet authoritative voice coaches the caller through rescuing the injured American Kestrel in their backyard. "Don't give it any water, no food of any kind," she says, scribbling quick notes to pass along to the rescue volunteers.

It's the fourth or fifth in a series of calls this morning, and for each, Phyllis has a welcoming voice and a reassuring answer. She's also managing the ticket window (busier than you might expect for a Friday during the school year) and training a new volunteer in all of this. It's a lot to manage by any standard, but Hall's calm demeanor never wavers. It's easy to see why she has been named the Volunteer of the Year at both the Center for Birds of Prey and Audubon Florida, and why her name constantly comes up when talking about effective, extraordinary chapter leaders.

[Read more.](#)



Robin Marquez, assistant curator for UCF's "Bug Closet" Collection of Arthropods, took some graduation photos with the collection. Photo: Darya Farsinejad.

## Conservation Leadership Initiative Students Soar to New Heights

Audubon Florida's Conservation Leadership Initiative (CLI) grants 25 undergraduate students annually the chance to match with a local undergraduate student mentorship and work on a conservation project of their choosing. Each cohort kicks off at the annual Audubon Florida Assembly, providing students the unique opportunity to network with conservation leaders while learning about the organization and its mission.

Meet Clara Sola, Jennifer Quintero, and Robin Marquez: three CLI alumni who are currently thriving in their respective conservation careers, and for whom the CLI program proved instrumental.

[Read more.](#)



Audubon coastal team members Brian Cammarano and Alysia Martin install protective signs and fencing for a Black Skimmer colony nesting along the Navarre Bridge in the Florida Panhandle. Photo: Brian Cammarano/Audubon Florida.

## Busy Beach Season for Birds Nesting on Florida's Coastlines

Audubon is calling on beachgoers to make beaches safer for birds by avoiding their nesting areas during the busy summer season — and we thank our coastal team for their efforts to protect birds, monitor populations, and work with partner organizations at more than 300 sites across Florida.

These special birds lay their eggs right on the sand. They perceive an approaching human as a threat and will take flight whenever people, or their dogs, approach too closely. If disturbed too often, the birds abandon their eggs and nesting sites.

To make our beaches safer for birds:

- Give nesting birds as much space as possible. Signs or people will alert you to these areas, but some birds haven't settled down to start nesting yet and may just look like they are resting in the sand.
- Avoid walking through flocks of birds.
- If pets are permitted on beaches, keep them leashed and well away from birds.
- Remove trash and food scraps, which attract predators that will also eat birds' eggs and/or chicks.
- Do not drive on beach dunes or other nesting areas.

[Are you interested in volunteering with us? Click here!](#)



Publix Serves Day volunteers. Photos: Renée Wilson/Audubon Florida, Kristina O'Hern/Audubon Florida, and Jay Besse/Audubon Florida.

## Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary Thanks Publix Volunteers

Last month, we were grateful to the employees and management of local Publix Supermarket Stores, who with gear of sweat and grit in honor of Publix Supermarket Day. Equipped with safety gear and land stewardship tools, our friends from Publix volunteered their time to trim overgrown vegetation in the parking lot and remove invasive plants around campus alongside our land management and facilities staff. We greatly appreciate their volunteer service and continued support. This is what community impact looks like!

Keep your network informed of opportunities and ways to get involved by sharing this newsletter today.