



Fall 2024

Hosted by



Hillsborough
County Florida

www.fbnfestival.org

info@fbnfestival.org

Suncoast

Youth Conservation Center



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- Field Trips
- Fishing Clinics
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- Volunteering

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813-922-7969 or
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Florida Youth Conservation
Centers Network
fyccn.com



Welcome



FLORIDA BIRDING
& NATURE FESTIVAL

We are delighted you have joined us! We are celebrating the wonders of the birds, wildlife, and natural lands that we enjoy in West Central Florida. We hope that you will see new birds, find new places to go, and learn new things about our area and its wildlife as you participate in this Festival.

FIELD TRIPS

Our 24 field trips showcase some of the best natural areas of our six county areas, protected as national wildlife refuges, state and county public parks, or nature preserves, or private lands. There are trips to search for birds, butterflies, dragonflies, and turtles. Most trips are on foot, but some are by boat, kayak, in wagons, or driving. Many trips are to places open by special arrangement to the Festival and led by the natural area managers themselves. In the west central region of Florida, long-term efforts to protect significant natural areas offer us a broad spectrum of natural habitats that are well managed -- and the wild animals, including birds, that these areas support for our field trippers to observe.

SEMINARS

Our Seminar Series starts with a two-part series on bird photography by National Geographic artist and explorer Tim Laman. Tim shares fundamentals for successful bird photography to help you be ready to "capture the action". The other Seminars cover a broad range of topics, including killer whales, basics on how-to-bird-watch, bird migration, conservation of Florida's Scrub-Jays, gopher tortoises' role in the ecosystem, invertebrates in sediments and their importance for bay health, Florida's butterflies butterfly-book author Marc Minno, sharks' impressively powerful anatomy, imperiled birds, dolphins, and eagles and conservation in Florida, and the relationship between Snail Kites and their sole prey, the Apple Snail. It's a diverse, interesting, and informative set of talks, not to be missed. *Note: we are offering the talks by Zoom, for watching live and recording them too – so if you're on a field trip, you can still see these presentations.*

KEYNOTES

The evening Keynotes and buffet suppers are hosted by the Ruskin Firehouse Cultural Center. Friday's Keynote speaker is bird artist and field guide author, David Allen Sibley. David's clear descriptions of North American birds and insights into bird behaviors and anatomy help bird enthusiasts of all skills and levels of bird knowledge learn more. Saturday's speaker, ornithologist and National Geographic photographer Tim Laman, shares insights from a lifetime of documenting wildlife across the globe. Tim's images of birds in their natural habitats inspire a greater appreciation for birds and the importance

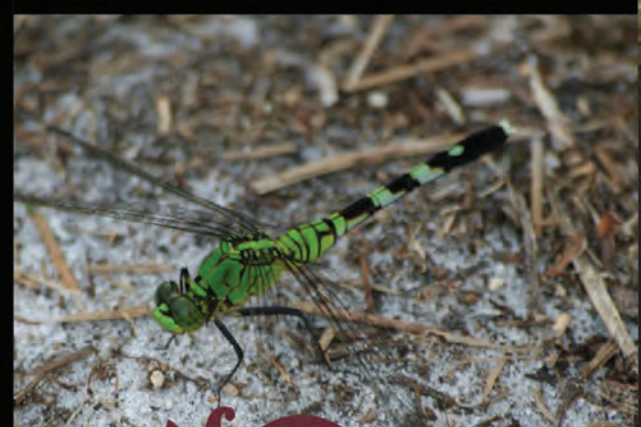
NATURE EXPO

Come one, come all. The Nature Expo offers opportunities for the public to visit multiple tables of nature products, including binoculars, vendors, artwork, educational exhibits, native plants, conservation organization materials, environmental items, and other nature-related products. Earthquest will present free-flying Bird Performances on Saturday at 11 a.m. and 2:30 p.m., with exhibiting hawks, eagles, falcons, and owls. The Nature Expo is free and open to the public from 10 am to 5 pm on Friday and Saturday at the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Suncoast Youth Conservation Center on Dickman Road in Apollo Beach, south of the Manatee Viewing Center.



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Keynote Events

Keynote Events will include a buffet dinner. Doors open at 5:30 pm,

FRIDAY October 18, 2024 | Doors Open 5:30 pm

David Allen Sibley, Author

American Ornithologist (Hosted by TECO and SYCC)

He knows every North American bird: by its shade, by its tilt, by its habitat, by its male, female, and juvenile plumages. It's only natural; he's the son of a Yale ornithologist and has been birding since his childhood in Connecticut. Sibley was only seven when he began drawing birds, filing his illustrations away along with clips about the natural history of each species. He's the author of *The Birds of Cape May*, *The Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior*, *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America*, *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America*, *Hawks in Flight*, and *Sibley's Birding Basics*. All together he has sold more than 1.75 million copies of his books.



SATURDAY October 19, 2024 | Doors Open 5:30 pm

Tim Laman, Biologist and Filmmaker

Bird Planet - A Photography Journey

(Hosted by Mosaic and Hillsborough County CELM)

Tim Laman has published 24 feature stories in *National Geographic* magazine, as well as worked on natural history films for *National Geographic*, the *BBC*, and *Netflix*. Tim's work has garnered numerous awards, including the overall prize *Wildlife Photographer of the Year* in 2016, a 1st place *Nature Story* from *World Press Photo*, and the *North American Nature Photography Association's "Nature Photographer of the Year"*. Tim is a fellow of the *Explorer's Club* and of the *International League of Conservation Photographers*, as well as the co-founder of the *Birds-of-Paradise Project* at the *Cornell Lab of Ornithology*.

Seminars AT-A-GLANCE

9 am Birds, Camera, Action Part 1, Tim Laman
10 :30 Birds, Camera, Action Part 2, Tim Laman

11 am

FRIDAY

12 pm

1 pm Killer Whales, Tom and Lindsay Bell

2 pm Birding 101, Travis Blunden

3 pm Migration, Dr. Mary Keith

4 pm Florida Scrub-Jay Conservation, Dr. Raoul Boughton

9 am Gopher Tortoise Conservation, George L. Heinrich

10 am Sediment Invertebrates, Dave Karlen

11 am Florida's Butterflies, Dr. Marc Minno

12 pm Sharks, Dr. Dan Huber

1 pm Dolphins, Dr. Katie McHugh

2 pm Bald Eagles, Stephen Nesbitt

3 pm Florida's Imperiled Birds, Adam Kent

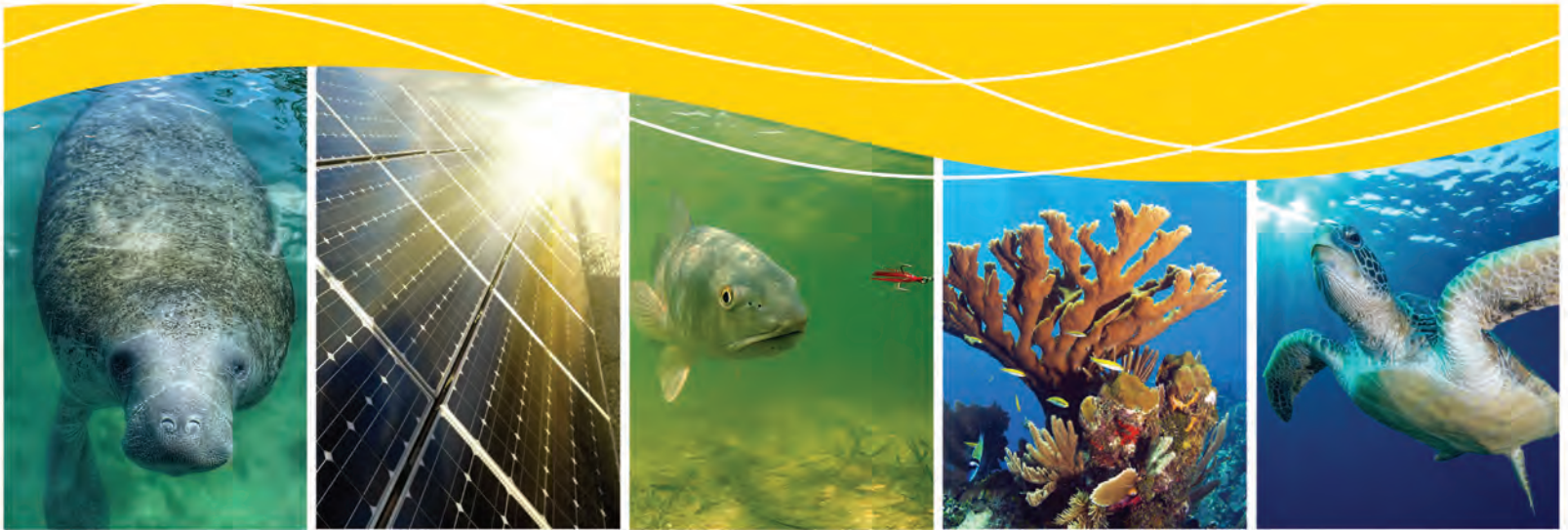
4 pm Snail Kites and Their Apple Snail Prey, Gina Kent

Welcome to the 2023 Florida Birding & Nature Festival!



Thank you for coming to share some of the best birding in the Tampa Bay area with us! We and our surrounding counties have such a wealth of habitats, from saltwater marshes to pine flatwoods, we are delighted to show off the birds and wildlife they support. We've rounded up our best local experts, brought in others from across the state, and put together a line-up of field trips to help you find your wish-list birds, including our second time only, all-day Florida Specialties bus trip. The seminars range from sea urchins to turtles, sparrows to penguins, and plenty more. And we hope you won't miss either of the great keynotes, they're both so good. If you have questions, please find someone at the Registration table or the Tampa Audubon table. And most of all, have a great time!

Mary Keith, Board Secretary, Florida Birding & Nature Festival, Tampa Audubon Society



WELCOME TO THE Florida Birding & Nature Festival

Tampa Electric is thrilled to once again host this event!

The Florida Conservation & Technology Center (FCTC) campus includes four champions of the environment: Tampa Electric, the Florida Aquarium, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and the University of Florida.

Tampa Electric is proud to provide our environmental partners the amenity-rich campus for their important research and educational outreach. Beyond the birds and the nature you're here to see, there's so much more!

Tampa Electric's Manatee Viewing Center is the cornerstone of FCTC. It's a sanctuary for the gentle giants and a fantastic and free way for visitors to see manatees and native Florida habitats.

Tampa Electric's Clean Energy Center features fun, interactive games to teach kids about clean energy. The working laboratory collects and monitors energy from its solar and wind generation.

The Florida Aquarium operates its Coral Conservation Center and Sea Turtle Rehabilitation Center - and more - on the FCTC campus.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission operates the Suncoast Youth Conservation Center at FCTC, providing field trips, summer camps and activities such as kayaking, fishing and hiking.

The University of Florida conducts important research on sea urchins, oysters, corals and more on campus and in the bay.

Learn more about the Florida Conservation & Technology Center at tampaelectric.com/fctc



Seminars

FRIDAY

Birds, Camera, Action Part 1

Tim Laman

9:00 - 10:30 am

These talks are aimed at beginner to moderately experienced bird photographers, but even veterans might gain some insights by learning how Tim approaches different situations in the field. From setting up your camera in "Ready for Action" mode, to making the most of your autofocus system and exposure modes for different situations, Tim covers the fundamentals of successful bird photography. Attendance limited to 75.

Birds, Camera, Action Part 2

Tim Laman

10:30 am - Noon

These talks are aimed at beginner to moderately experienced bird photographers, but even veterans might gain some insights by learning how Tim approaches different situations in the field. Building on Part 1, in this presentation Tim will elaborate further on managing exposure in various situations and share his tips for photographing birds in flight and getting creative with capturing birds in action. Attendance limited to 75.

Killer Whales

Tom and Lindsay Bell

1:00 pm

Southern Resident Killer Whales are severely endangered. A significant problem to their survival is the death rate of their young. A couple of years ago the world watched while one of these mother whales carried her dead calf on the water's surface for over two weeks while she grieved. Finding an unexpected ally, researchers are applying aspects that have been learned about the endangered mountain gorillas in Africa to this whale's plight. Although very different species, their similarities may inspire the survival of this whale population. Lindsay and Tom Bell will share many of their personal experiences with and their amazing photos of these magnificent Orcas.



Join our flock!

The Florida Ornithological Society connects professional and amateur ornithologists and birders in the state, with quarterly newsletters, a peer-reviewed scientific journal, spring and fall meetings, field trips, grants, awards, and more!

Learn more and join us at fosbirds.org!



Seminars

FRIDAY

Birding 101

Travis Blunden

2:00 pm

Curious about the many different birds around you? Do you wonder why people travel across the state, the country, and even the world to look at birds? Designed for the beginning or casual birder who wants to learn more, Travis Blunden in Birding 101 explains what birding is, what you need to get started, and lots of tools and tips to help you learn "how to do it". Topics include choosing binoculars, identification, using field guides, cell phone applications, and online tools. Be warned: Birding can be addictive!

Birds do it, bees do it... Migrate, of course!

Dr. Mary Keith

3:00 pm

Mary Keith's talk will provide a quick look at who, what, why, where, and when birds migrate. She will describe some of the new technology that scientists use for tracking where the birds are going. And she will point out where to go in what season to look for birds migrating in Florida. Finally, she will explain the latest we've learned on how on earth the birds know where they're going.

Florida Scrub-Jay Conservation

Dr. Raoul Boughton

4:00 pm

Once phosphate mining is completed, reclamation of the mine site involves return of diverse native communities and rewilding with endangered and rare vertebrate species. The Mosaic Florida Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*) Program relocates birds to a different location, enhances the habitat there, commits to protecting these relocated populations in perpetuity, recolonizes former populations, and rescues populations through translocations and reclaiming scrub habitats on mined lands. The conserved area for this Habitat Management Plan includes the North and South Wellfield and partnership with Manatee County's Duette Preserve and the South Florida Water Management District's Coker Tract. These sites offer native scrub and scrubby flatwoods but require habitat management with fire for Florida Scrub-Jays. For the last 20 years, Mosaic has conserved these sites, undertaken habitat management, supported research concerning the success of translocation, and monitored the long-term population results. Building on past efforts, the project has grown the 14 impacted groups to more than 40 groups and 120 adults. Learn about Florida Scrub-Jay conservation and Mosaic's commitment to recovery of the species.



Seminars

SATURDAY

Gopher Tortoise Conservation

George L. Heinrich

9:00 am

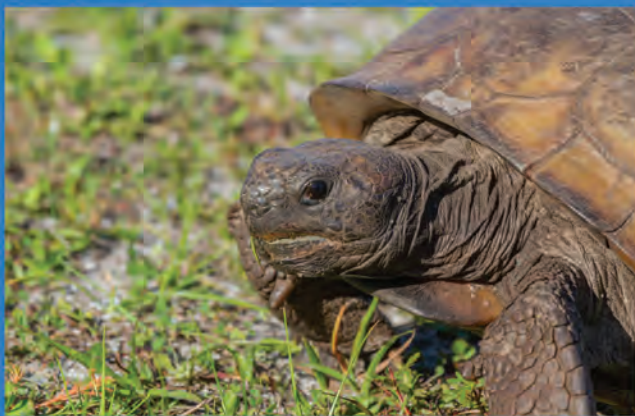
Gopher tortoises (*Gopherus polyphemus*) are ecosystem engineers that create extensive burrow systems and disperse seeds, significantly contributing to upland habitat biodiversity. This presentation will examine the value of gopher tortoise conservation on small public lands, as well as address the challenges of managing natural areas bordered by urban interface.

Sediment Invertebrates

Dave Karlen

10:00 am

Benthic Ecology is the study of bottom habitats in the marine and freshwater environments. The invertebrate community living on (epifauna) and in (infauna) the bottom sediments are an important component of the marine food web and influence the cycling of nutrients between the sediment and water column. The benthic community also serves as an important indicator of the overall health of the marine environment and are often used in monitoring programs. The Environmental Protection Commission of Hillsborough County has been conducting annual benthic monitoring in Tampa Bay since 1993 in partnership with the Tampa Bay Estuary Program and Pinellas and Manatee Counties. This presentation will give a general overview of the field of Benthic Ecology and how benthic communities are utilized in environmental monitoring and more specifically, summarize results from 30 years of benthic monitoring in Tampa Bay in relation to long-term water quality trends.



Florida's Butterflies

Dr. Marc Minno

11:00 am

Marc Minno, an expert on endangered butterflies and their habitats, has literally written the books on Florida's butterflies. He will share fascinating facts about these beautiful insects, including which ones we can see here, what they do and how we can interpret their behaviors, where they live, what their caterpillars eat, how they are doing in Florida, and how we can invite them to share our world. He loves butterflies, and his engaging talk is inspirational and highly informative.

Sharks

Dr. Dan Huber

12:00 pm

Sharks possess an incredible array of morphological, physiological, and behavioral attributes that have kept them at the top of oceanic food webs for hundreds of millions of years. Dr. Dan Huber studies the biomechanics of shark feeding and locomotion to understand how the mechanical function of a shark's body contributes to this ecological and evolutionary success over time. For topics ranging from the effect of bite force on feeding ecology to the effect of vertebral biomechanics on the health of captive sharks, Dr. Huber uses the tools of mechanical engineering to better understand sharks, which rank among the most successful predators in the history of life on earth.

Seminars

SATURDAY

Dolphins

Dr. Katie McHugh

1:00 pm

We all share the coastal environment with dolphins and other wildlife who call our local waters home. Learn more about Florida's dolphins and their estuarine and coastal habitats from the world's longest-running dolphin conservation research program - the Chicago Zoological Society's Sarasota Dolphin Research Program. Dr. McHugh will share findings from 50+ years of work along the Gulf Coast as well as opportunities to engage with dolphin conservation.

Surveying Florida's Bald Eagles: 1972 to 2017

Stephen Nesbitt

2:00 pm

Stephen Nesbitt conducted the statewide Bald Eagle surveys for the State of Florida as staff for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission for 40 years. He will explain how survey methods changed over the years, what he learned about the population during that time, and how that knowledge was applied to the statewide and region-wide management of the species.

Florida's Imperiled Birds

Adam Kent

3:00 pm

Florida has one of the highest concentrations of threatened and endangered birds in the United States. We'll discuss how and why birds are listed and what's being done to protect them now. Plus, we'll talk about where to find many of these captivating birds!

Snail Kite and Prey

Gina Kent

4:00 pm

The Snail Kite's U.S. distribution is limited to Florida. Snail Kites feed almost entirely on a single species, the Apple Snail, which is influenced by the timing and distribution of surface water conditions. Striking declines in Snail Kites have been directly tied to human-caused changes in hydrology which affect the availability of the kite's food source and safe nesting locations. By tracking the Snail Kites' movements with GPS-trackers, we identify foraging spots to sample the density of Apple Snails and understand what habitat characteristics best attract and support the birds. The GPS locations of the kites also allow us to identify nesting and roosting sites as well as long-distance tracks we can use in management recommendations for this endangered raptor.



Photo: Chris Burney



SE7EN WETLANDS

MAIN PUBLIC ENTRANCE:
(THROUGH LOYCE HARPE PARK)
500 W. CARTER ROAD
MULBERRY, FL 33813
7AM - 7PM DAILY

FOR MORE INFORMATION: 





NATURE EXPO



Native Plant Play



SIERRA CLUB
TAMPA BAY GROUP



Artisans of Stonestrow



Hillsborough County Florida

Vendors & Exhibitors



Priori-Sheets
Art & Photography



Birdhouse
Showcase



Field Trips

THURSDAY

Pre-Festival Bus Trip Seeking Florida's Special Birds

Dave Goodwin, Jim Eager, Bob Snow, Cole Frederick

7:30 am – 4:00 pm
Thu-BT | \$100

Saddle Creek Park and Circle B Bar Reserve Bus Trip (includes lunch). The bus will leave FWC's Suncoast Youth Conservation Center at 7:30 and arrive at Saddle Creek Park, a well-known leading site for fall migratory warblers and songbirds in the mixed hardwood and cypress forest habitats. During migration, over 30 species have been recorded including Bay-breasted, Canada, Cerulean, Golden-winged and Wilson's warblers. Rarities such as Black-throated Gray Warbler and Philadelphia Vireo have also been seen. The next stop is the Circle B Bar Reserve, a highlight of the Great Florida Birding Trail. We'll look for alligators, eagles, Osprey, Red-shouldered Hawks, Wild Turkey, Barred Owls, Wood Storks, White Ibis, Sandhill Cranes, moorhens, Pied-billed Grebes, Black-necked Stilts, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Bobwhite, Eastern Meadowlarks, Savannah Sparrows, American Kestrels, Great Blue Herons, American White Pelicans, sandpipers, spoonbills, Great Egrets, ducks and other waterfowl, and wading birds. We might also see otters, bobcats, grey fox, armadillos, squirrels (gray and fox varieties), frogs, turtles, black racer snakes, five-lined racerunner lizards, and other reptiles. Many migratory birds can be found here. Walk about 2 miles at each site.

This trip is by bus-only. All registrants must meet at the Festival site at 7:00 am to begin boarding. Be sure to bring insect repellent, water, snacks, and a hat, and to wear walking shoes. This tour includes a box lunch.



"John James Audubon's Birds of America" at the St. Petersburg Museum of Fine Arts

Museum Docent

1:00 pm
Thu-BA | \$25

Once the docent-led portion is over, all attendees may view the rest of the Museum's exhibits. Produced by National Museums Scotland, this exhibition celebrates the extraordinary legacy of John James Audubon (1785 –1851). It tells the story of this iconic artist, naturalist, and ornithologist, as well as the evolution of one of the world's rarest, largest, and possibly most coveted books, The Birds of America. Printed almost two hundred years ago, its epic scale and spectacular life-sized bird illustrations caused a sensation. The exhibition features over 40 of these splendid hand-colored prints, as well as additional illustrations, books, letters, photographs, and ephemera. The majority of these delicate pieces have never been shown in public and have undergone years of conservation treatment in preparation for their inaugural display and tour. <https://mfastpete.org/audubons-birds-of-america/>

Coffeepot Bayou Bird Island, Pinellas County - Boat Trip

Jeff Liechty

6:30 – 8:00 pm
Thu-CB | \$60

We have reserved Tampa Bay Watch's Discovery Eco-Tour boat leaving from the St. Petersburg Pier for an evening field trip to Coffeepot Bayou. Board the boat at the pier area at 6-6:15. We leave the dock at 6:30 and return by 8 at dusk. We travel across Old Tampa Bay to Coffeepot Bayou Bird Island and watch colonial waterbirds up close. Although the birds are not nesting, we will see Brown Pelicans, Anhingas, cormorants, and all the herons and egrets, including state-listed "threatened" Little Blue Herons, Tricolored Herons, and Reddish Egrets, plus Roseate Spoonbills. Audubon Florida's Coastal Islands Sanctuary staff will provide commentary.

Thank you for adventuring with us!



Hillsborough County Conservation and Environmental Lands is always honored to share our spaces with others in order to inspire champions for the environment.

**We hope to see you in our
parks and preserves very
soon!**

Scan the QR code to sign
up for our newsletter and
join our programs!



Coming Up: Hillsborough County Hiking Spree!

November 1st 2024 - March 31st 2025

Learn More at hcfl.gov/hikingspree

Field Trips

FRIDAY

Outback Key and Lower Terra Ceia Bay with Tampa Bay Watch – Boat Trip

Eric Plage, Kara Durda

8:00 – 11:30 am
Fri-OK | \$60

This boat trip will go out to a barrier island on the Gulf that is a prime birding spot. You will ride out, then walk parts of the island scanning for shore birds, including Marbled Godwits, Willets, Long-billed Curlews, and plenty of peeps, plus waders and possibly Reddish Egrets. You will then boat into Terra Ceia to the islands of Pinellas National Wildlife Refuge, including Jackass Key, a roost site for Magnificent Frigatebirds! Your leader is a shorebird expert so you'll get plenty of tips on how to distinguish one from another. Be sure to bring sunscreen, water, snacks, hat, and anything you will want on the boat or island walk. Wear shoes that can get wet so that you can walk on Outback Key.

Se7en Wetlands, Lakeland, Polk County – Wagon Trip

Dr. Mary Keith, Nicole Barber, Molly Klinepeter

8:00 – 11:30 am
Fri-SW | \$30

Once a phosphate mine, the City of Lakeland owns and operates Se7en Wetlands south of Lakeland. The 1,600 acres of marshes, swamps, uplands, and lakes are designed into a wetland treatment system using seven ponds of various depths. Water circulates from one to the next to provide final polishing treatment for the City's wastewater with connection to the North Prong of the Alafia River, which flows directly to Tampa Bay. Se7en Wetlands boasts an outstanding and diverse community of plant and animal species. In the spring it hosts a waterbird breeding colony including Roseate Spoonbills and Wood Storks. In the winter American Bitterns and sandpipers use the wetlands habitats. Two pairs of Bald Eagles nest there. We will travel by van around the larger wetlands uplands where the incoming water is distributed. We will stop to search for birds, alligators, otters or other wildlife.

Roberts Bay Bird Colony Island on the Carefree Learner – Boat Trip

Megan Ehlers, Mark Rachal

8:00 – 11:30 am
Fri-RB | \$60

We'll cruise south across Sarasota Bay to see the islands, habitat for the largest nesting colony for wading birds and Brown Pelicans in Sarasota Bay. The Roberts Bay Bird Colony has been designated by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission as a "Critical Wildlife Area" and is managed by Audubon Florida. Listed species including Little Blue Herons, Tricolored Herons, Reddish Egrets, Roseate Spoonbills, and American Oystercatchers. We will coast near the three islands and observe the behavior of these beautiful wading birds. Commentary will be provided by the professional staff of Audubon Florida's Coastal Islands Sanctuaries.

Cross Bar / Al Bar Ranch, Spring Hill, Pasco County

David Adams, Christine Rowland

8:00 am – Noon
Fri-CA | \$25

The 12,500-acre Cross Bar/Al Bar Ranch is managed as a wellfield by Pinellas County Utilities. With wetlands, oak hammock, pine flatwoods, and open pastures, it offers prime birding but is not normally open to the public. Accompanied by the site managers, you will carpool out to check the wetlands for waders and the pastures for Burrowing Owls. Florida Scrub-Jays, Barred Owls and even coyotes are possible sightings. Preferably drive a vehicle with AWD that can handle rough roads. If you have an AWD vehicle, please bring it so we can carpool.

Duette Preserve – Wagon Trip

Aedan Stockdale, Mike Elswick, Adam Kent, Gina Kent

8:30 – 11:00 am
Fri-DP | \$30

Come and take a ride back in time across an austere landscape where grasses, wildflowers, and palmetto still dominate; where longleaf pine stands are being restored, Bachman's sparrows and scrub jays are thriving. Our wagon comfortably seats 20. Joining us will be the manager of our Education and Volunteer Division, Aedan Stockdale and manager of the Resource Management team Mike Elswick. We'll discuss the history of the site, the plants and wildlife found there, and the restoration and management efforts past and ongoing.

Field Trips

FRIDAY

Honeymoon Island State Park, Pinellas County

Dan Larremore, David Simpson

8:30 am – Noon

Fri-HI | \$25

Honeymoon Island State Park is well known for the migrants it attracts and the many shorebirds that use its beaches. Your leader is the Environmental Specialist for the park, and shorebirds are his specialty, so this should be a great walk! Besides all the plovers and sandpipers, godwits and Willets, Reddish Egrets and oystercatchers along the shorelines, Merlins patrol the edges looking for an unwary breakfast, Great Horned Owls nest in the pine forest on the island, and the Osprey Trail is well named. This trip will focus on shorebirds, how to distinguish them in their winter drab and by their shapes and postures. The back lagoon will probably have the waders who prefer quieter waters. Take a picnic lunch for a post-walk lunch on the beach or at picnic tables near the Osprey Trail at the north end of the park road.



Cockroach Bay Aquatic Preserve

Mary Barnwell, Travis Blunden

8:30 am – Noon

Fri-CB | \$25

The Cockroach Bay Ecosystem Restoration Project represents one of the largest, most complex coastal ecosystem restoration projects ever developed for Tampa Bay. Named for the abundant horseshoe crabs ("roaches") in the nearby waters, after 20 years the Preserve is a model of habitat diversity. Wading birds will be leaving a nearby night roost. A moderate hike up "Mount Cockroach" offers a view of the tidal and freshwater wetlands and gallinules, Limpkins and egrets. Neotropical migrants abound in the savannah-like landscape. Both White and Glossy ibis frequent the freshwater ponds and wetlands, as do Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks. The area is close to the bay so gulls and terns will sail overhead. Gull-billed Terns nest nearby and often continue in the area year-round. Spoonbills use the tidal lagoon, and passerines forage in the old oaks. The freshwater pond to the south is well-known for the wintering ducks to be found there.

Upper Tampa Bay Park Habitat – Kayak Trip

Ashley Martin, Carol Cassels

12:00 – 3:30 pm

Fri-UB | \$60

Experience a celestial event – the changing of the tides - and the habitats at Upper Tampa Bay Conservation Park during this two and a half-hour kayak adventure! Kayak out Double Branch Creek to Old Tampa Bay with the ebb tide, explore the open bay during the slack, and return to the launch site with the incoming tide. Pass mangrove forests, oysterbars, sand and mudflats, and seagrass beds. Look for American Oystercatchers, herons and egrets, Ospreys, and shorebirds and perhaps manatees and dolphins. Our leaders are County Park Managers and bird experts.

An advertisement for the Tampa Bay Estuary Specialty License Plate. It features a man in a white shirt and a blue and white baseball cap, looking at a large fish. The text reads: "PROTECT YOUR PLAYGROUND With the Tampa Bay Estuary Specialty License Plate". Below this, it says "Proceeds from plate sales directly fund Tampa Bay restoration projects". The license plate itself is shown, featuring a fish and the text "FLORIDA T-BAY Tampa Bay Estuary". The logo for TBEP (Tampa Bay Estuary Program) is also visible.

Available at your local DMV or tax collector's office or by mail

Field Trips

SATURDAY

Blackwater Creek Preserve, Hillsborough County

Rebecca Winch, Charlie Fisher, Dr. Mark McRae

7:30 – 11:30 am

Sat-BC | \$25

This 2,200 acre preserve includes some of the finest remaining examples of long-leaf pine-dominated mesic pine flatwoods and blackwater streams, interspersed with hardwood hammocks, cypress domes, freshwater marshes, and wet prairies. Join Preserve Land Management Staff and expert birders to find Wood Storks, Sandhill Cranes, hawks and herons, sparrows and woodpeckers, and fall migrants. Blackwater Creek's former cattle pastures and tree farms were acquired between 1997-2003, and are now preserved to allow hiking and wildlife viewing. The site is scientifically managed to preserve these environmentally sensitive lands. Parts of the trail may be flooded due to the rainy weather in August and September. The water on the trail could get to 8 inches deep in some places so there will definitely be some soggy feet. Please wear shoes and trousers that allow walking through water.

Fort De Soto County Park, Pinellas County

David Goodwin, Jim Eager, Travis Blunden

7:30 am – Noon

Sat-FD | \$25

Fort De Soto County Park is a premier birding destination in Florida. More than 250 species of birds have been recorded in the park over the years. Fall migration brings neo-tropical migratory species to the park as well as occasional wanderers from the Caribbean and the western United States. The island's shorebird diversity is one of the best on the Florida west coast. This trip is intended for advanced birders, and will be offered on both Saturday and Sunday. You will meet at the flagpole, then drive or walk to the hotspots of the day. Short easy walking at all times. If you care to bring your spotting scope, it will be handy for studying the shorebirds along the beach. If there's a passerine fallout you'll be in the wooded areas finding warblers, thrushes and buntings. There's never a bad day birding at Ft D!

Richard T. Paul Alafia Bank Bird Sanctuary – Boat Trip

Jeff Liechty, Mark Rachal, Chris Cooley, Tim Laman

8:00 – 11:00 am

Sat-AB | \$60

Join Audubon Florida's Sanctuary Managers for a boat trip from the Port of Tampa to the Alafia Bank Bird Sanctuary in Hillsborough Bay. This island sanctuary hosts the largest Roseate Spoonbill nesting colony on the west coast of Florida, as well as being a valuable nesting site for Brown Pelicans, herons and egrets, and White and Glossy ibis. The Alafia Bank has been ranked by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission as Florida's most important waterbird nesting colony and is an FWC-designated "Critical Wildlife Area". While October is not the nesting season, we can expect to see a wide variety of waterbirds, including American Oystercatchers, terns, and shorebirds. Mark Rachal and Jeff Liechty, Audubon Sanctuary Manager and Biologist, will describe restoration, protection, and management of this internationally recognized "Important Bird Area". On the way, we'll look for dolphins. Bring your binoculars as we stay on the boat for this field trip. The boat leaves the dock at 8 a.m., so please plan to board by at least 7:45 am.

Gibbons Preserve

Logan Lane, Nathan LaFata

8:30 – 11:00 am

Sat-GP | \$25

The Myron and Helen Gibbons Preserve is a 60-acre forest that has not been logged. The Gibbons family donated the preserve to the Tampa Bay Conservancy, a regional land trust. The 1.5-mile trail crosses Bell Creek and winds through oak and mixed hardwood and cypress wetlands before reaching the shoreline of the Alafia River and looping back to the parking area. Suncoast Native Plant Society members identified over 120 plant species here in 2005. Providing natural shoreline on the Alafia River, this refuge for wildlife protects water quality. Although this trip is mainly an old growth forest riverine habitat walk, you may spot warblers, vireos, woodpeckers, and more in the hammocks, and waders may be along the river's edge. The trail is narrow, and there are roots. While most is flat, there are some steep spots near the river banks, and spots may be wet, depending on recent rains, so shoes for wading across wet areas are recommended.

Field Trips

SATURDAY

Newman Branch Kayak and Upland Trail Hike – Kayak Trip

Stan Kroh, Jason Chilson

9:00 – 11:30 am

Sat-NB | \$60

Leaving from the Youth Conservation Center, you will paddle Newman Branch, through mangrove tunnels into Seneca Sound, a small embayment that is part of Hillsborough and Tampa bays. You will learn about the species of mangroves and their adaptations for a salty environment and also visit the restored wetlands and uplands of the Newman Branch Restoration project. Possible sightings of birds include night-herons, Little Blue and Tricolored herons, and Reddish Egrets.

Fred and Idah Schultz Preserve, Bugs and Butterflies

*John Lamkin, Rob Epstein, Dr. Marc Minno,
Donald Fraser*

2:00 – 5:00 pm

Sat-SP | \$25

The 134-acre Fred and Idah Schultz Preserve, dredged from Hillsborough Bay to create developable land in the 1970s, has been restored over the last 25 years to mangrove forest, coastal and freshwater marsh, coastal dunes, and uplands. The diverse habitats make it THE place for a wide variety of butterflies and other pollinators, including the northern-most colony of Julia Butterflies. Plenty of birds are possible too! Enjoy the nice walk through the varied habitats, but as the walking paths are rough in places, this trip is possibly not suitable for some. There is some shade available but most is sunny, and there are no facilities, so wear a hat and bring water and a snack.



Our mission is to promote conservation, awareness, and appreciation of the National Wildlife Refuges and assist the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with their programs for those refuges. We accomplish this through outreach, education, advocacy, and volunteering to protect the nesting and resting sea and shorebirds and other wildlife on the refuges as well as protecting the habitat they need to thrive.

Friends of Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuges



www.TampaBayRefuges.org

Make a difference in your own backyard!

Field Trips

SUNDAY

Lower Green Swamp, Hillsborough County

Rebecca Winch, Charlie Fisher

7:30 – 11:30 am

Sun-LGS | \$25

The Lower Green Swamp Preserve, once a working cattle ranch, is being restored to native habitat by Hillsborough County's environmental lands staff. You will visit only a portion of the 12,800 acres of this preserve, but they are glorious! From the parking area the trail crosses a grassland where Eastern Towhees whistle and bobwhites scurry in the early hours, Loggerhead Shrikes snag grasshoppers, and eagles perch on the power poles. Eastern Bluebirds and Red-headed Woodpeckers share the open wooded and pine areas with vireos and Common Yellowthroats. After crossing Itchepackesassa Creek you'll enter an open pine flatwoods where Sandhill Cranes, turkeys, and Bachman's Sparrows rule the roost. At the far end there is a large wetland with Purple Gallinules, Anhingas and Wood Ducks. The trail loops back and follows the creek along an oak hammock dripping with Spanish moss to return to the bridge and then the parking area. Barred Owls and Wood Ducks are sometimes seen along the creek, and of course any migrating warbler will enjoy the insect life it offers. County staff overseeing the restoration will lead the tour to explain and showcase the restoration.

Fort De Soto County Park, Pinellas County

David Goodwin, Jim Eager

7:30 am – Noon

Sun-FD | \$25

Fort De Soto County Park is a premier birding destination in Florida. More than 250 species of birds have been recorded in the park over the years. Fall migration brings neo-tropical migratory species to the park as well as occasional wanderers from the Caribbean and the western United States. The island's shorebird diversity is one of the best on the Florida west coast. This trip is intended for advanced birders, and will be offered on both Saturday and Sunday. You will meet at the flagpole, then drive or walk to the hotspots of the day. Short, easy walking at all times. If you care to bring your spotting scope, it will be handy for studying the shorebirds along the beach. If there's a passerine fallout you'll be in the wooded areas finding warblers, thrushes and buntings. There's never a bad day birding at Ft D!

Photography Field Workshop, Circle B Reserve

Reinier Munguia

8:00 – 11:00 am

Sun-PW | \$25

Reinier Munguia has led photography field workshops for 20 years, all over the world. Participants will learn photographic techniques and develop skills to create better images. This workshop will be at the Circle B Bar Reserve, among the best regional birding spots. Shallow wetlands intersected by raised levees for walking support habitat for Purple Gallinules, Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, Sora, American Bitterns, and more. Bald Eagles patrol the area, and previous trips have found both Peregrine Falcons and Merlins. Wildlife includes alligators and marsh rabbits. Wintering White Pelicans still leave room in the deeper lakes for ducks. Reinier says, "Wildlife photography is not about taking pictures, but to create images that portray nature at its best."

Celery Fields, Sarasota County

Jeanne Dubi, Lisa Sykes, David Simpson

8:00 – 11:00 am

Sun-CF | \$25

This 400-acre stormwater retention area in eastern Sarasota County is one of the Gulf Coast's best birding hot spots. The former agricultural fields have been restored to a meandering stream with wetlands and grasslands nestled among the curves. A hill with walking and equestrian trails overlooks the area, and two boardwalks allow access to the stream and marsh. With 220 species recorded at the site, the swamp and open water environment is a haven for Limpkins, bitterns, rails and herons. The Least Bitterns do not know that they are 'shy and retiring' here, Peregrine Falcons sail overhead, and variety of fall sparrows spend the winter. Depending on water level, shorebirds, waders and ducks may be abundant. Sarasota Audubon provides volunteer Bird Naturalists at each of the two boardwalks to help visitors identify birds and plants. The Nature Center with native plant gardens is also available for visitors to enjoy. Walks are on even paths or short boardwalks, but there is little shade and only a few benches. On your way in scan the ponds on either side of Coburn/Apex Rd for waterbirds as well.

Field Trips

SUNDAY

Birding & Banding in Hammock Park, Dunedin

Jim McGinity, Steve Aversa, Paul Trunk

8:00 am – Noon

Sun-BB | \$25

Come learn about bird banding, observe how ornithologists use it to learn about and conserve migratory birds, and enjoy our fall migratory birds while birding this 100-acre city park. The hammock's hardwoods and sabal palms attract numerous resident and migratory species. The Fern Trail in particular is known for having banner days in fall migration. You will observe the banding station action, seeing some of the local migrants up close while researchers measure, weigh and band them. Some participants will get a chance to release banded birds! You will also walk sections of the park and boardwalk to see what else is lurking in the bushes, along the stream, or zipping through the trees overhead. Warblers, vireos and thrushes are all good bets in the bushes, Golden-winged, Bay-breasted, Kentucky, Blackburnian, Canada and Cerulean warblers have been seen here, along with Baltimore Oriole, Black-billed Cuckoo, Veery, Wood Thrush and Scarlet Tanager. Herons, egrets, and night-herons wade the tidal stream. Osprey and Barred Owl occur year round, and winter brings ducks, rails, sandpipers and a multitude of sparrows. Raptors scan for the unwary over the open fields. The walk is easy, flat, not more than 2 miles.

Egmont Key National Wildlife Refuge/State Park – Boat Trip

Barb Howard, Dave Howard, Dr. Mary Keith

8:00 am – Noon

Sun-EK | \$60

Join the Fish and Wildlife Service staff and Friends of the Tampa Bay National Wildlife Refuge for a special boat cruise to Egmont Key National Wildlife Refuge/State Park in Pinellas County. Established in 1974 to protect migratory birds, the island is situated at the mouth of Tampa Bay and is also the site of historic Fort Dade. Three hundred soldiers served at the fort from 1898-1923 and the restored guardhouse is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The lighthouse, built in 1858, is still used for navigation. A key migratory bird fall-out site in fall migration, in most years, the island hosts a large seabird and pelican colony during the spring nesting season. We expect to see warblers, other songbirds, raptors, gulls, terns, and other seabirds. You can walk on the beach, and the inland paths on the island are paved or brick, so the walking is easy.

Frog Creek Paddling Trip, Terra Ceia Preserve – Paddling Trip

Randy Runnels

8:30 am – Noon

Sun-TC | \$60

Tampa Bay has relatively few natural, unobstructed tidal creeks left, and Frog Creek is one of the least developed and most species-rich. In a leisurely-paced paddling trip of a little over 2 miles, participants will experience a dramatic change in biota over a gradient from freshwater, with overhanging oaks, leather ferns, and sawgrass-lined shores to saltwater, through a significant mangrove forest and around oyster bars. This is an excellent foraging area for a variety of coastal bird species. Participants will need to paddle for a little over 2 miles, but it is at a leisurely pace and downstream. Kayaks will be provided, and you are welcome to bring your own if you prefer (but no discount is offered). Sunscreen, bug spray, and bottled water will be supplied.





Florida House of Representatives

Representative Lindsay Cross
House District 60

September 29, 2024

Bird and Nature Lovers:

Welcome friends! I'm delighted that you are spending your weekend at the Florida Birding and Nature Festival. This is truly a celebration of the beautiful and inspiring natural beauty of the West Central region.

As I write this letter, our region and state are beginning a long journey of recovery from Hurricane Helene, one of the most devastating natural disasters of our lifetime. As we extend support for our friends and neighbors, I'm also reminded of the enormous impacts to our ecosystem. Beaches and barrier islands - home to countless birds, small mammals, and invertebrates - have been permanently altered or destroyed. Household and industrial chemicals, debris, and waste washed into our waters, impacting water quality and food sources for fish and wildlife. It will take a long time to recover and our natural systems will require additional support -in the form of more aggressive and proactive policies and funding to restore habitats and water quality.

Land conservation and more sustainable development practices are at the top of the list as critical to the long-term success of our state. We must fully invest in programs like Florida Forever at the state level, as well as local land-buying and restoration programs. As we redevelop following Helene, particularly in coastal areas, we must incorporate more green infrastructure, areas for wildlife, and limit development in vulnerable areas.

Another key is recognizing and leveraging the value of nature-based recreation. As evidenced during the recently defeated attempts to privatize our state parks through construction of golf courses, pickleball courts and hotels, Floridians will fight for their beloved parks. Our parks and conservation areas are economic generators - but also worthy in their own right. If we are to inspire the next generation of conservationists, they need access to nature.

Friends, there is much work to do. This time of fellowship, field trips, seminars, and nature expos is a critical time to recharge and be inspired. I am confident that each of you will use what you've learned this weekend and leverage the relationships you've made to address the myriad challenges and opportunities to protect, restore, and celebrate our phenomenal natural environment. I am happy to be in the fight alongside each of you!

Happy Birding,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lindsay Cross".

Representative Lindsay Cross

program photo and art credits

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*Share your Festival experience
on our media channels!*

We encourage you to post photos and videos from field trips and seminars to our Facebook page (Florida Birding and Nature Festival) or tag us on Instagram

@floridabirdingandnaturefestival or
#floridabirdingandnaturefestival

We're Growing the Population of Florida Scrub Jays

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