

# Apalachee Audubon

The Newsletter of the Apalachee Audubon Society, Inc.

Vol. 108, No. 5

February 2010

www.apalachee.org

## FEBRUARY PROGRAM SPEAKER: SANDY BECK Owls: Tigers in our Skies

Thursday, February 25<sup>th</sup>, 918 Railroad Avenue  
Social at 7:00 p.m. Program 7:30 p.m.

Historically, considered messengers of death and doom, owls have been greatly misunderstood and feared. Early Christians associated the owl's haunting calls, dark habits and predatory powers with witches and the devil.

For many North American Indian tribes, an owl serves as a soul-bearer, transporting the spirit of a dead person to the life beyond.

But owls are not harbingers of death or evil—unless you happen to be a rat. When the cloak of night sweeps across the Earth, and the moon stretches our shadows, careful little creatures begin scanning the sky—for tigers that hunt on silent wings, the owls.

These nocturnal counterparts of hawks play similar roles in nature. Both have independently developed similar tools of the trade: keen eyesight, strong, grasping feet with razor-sharp talons, curved beaks and powerful wings. Both usually mate for life and are quite territorial.

They also prey on similar species; in any given habitat, birds of prey will be on duty 24 hours a day. By hawks carrying the day shift and owls taking over at night, they avoid competition.

Approximately 222 different species of owls can be found across our planet: thirty-seven in North America, five in Florida, and four that live year-round in North Florida. In recent years, burrowing owl populations have been slowly moving northward.

Sandy will discuss three native species—the Great Horned, Barred and Screech Owls—and explain the unique adaptations that make them spectacular nocturnal hunters as well as actions we can take to help protect these fascinating birds.



*Cedar the Barred Owl  
photo by Sandy Beck*

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Apalachee Audubon Wildlife-Friendly Yards Tour Saturday, February 20<sup>th</sup>

Our 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Wildlife-Friendly Yards Tour is being held Saturday, February 20<sup>th</sup> from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. We have selected five yards for this year's tour, including a local school that has gone to great lengths to incorporate nature into their school grounds and curriculum.

Tickets can be purchased at **Native Nurseries** and **Wild Birds Unlimited**. Ticket holders will receive addresses and maps to each location at the time of purchase.

Each yard has unique features to attract a variety of birds and other wildlife, such as wintering hummingbirds, orioles, tanagers, finches, and Pine Siskins, as well as our year-round residents. You will be inspired to maintain your own yard or green space for wildlife, whether it is one bird feeder, one nest box, one wildflower bed, one garden path, or one natural area.

Make a difference for wildlife, one yard at a time! Join us in our 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Wildlife-Friendly Yards Tour and fundraiser to benefit the Apalachee Audubon Society.

For more information, contact Pam Flynn, (850) 322-6287, tallypfly57@yahoo.com.

*Sandy Beck has served as Education Director with the St. Francis Wildlife Association since 1989. St. Francis Wildlife, a local non-profit organization, rescues and rehabilitates more than 3,000 sick, injured, and orphaned wild birds and animals from North Florida and South Georgia every year.*

*Sandy's Wild Classroom programs—which feature disabled raptors, mammals and reptiles—promote awareness, appreciation and understanding of native wildlife and the habitats we share.*

*In addition to her work with St. Francis Wildlife, she is also a nature writer and teaches gifted and talented students at Astoria Park Elementary.*

*She has been honored for her work by the Leon Association for Science Teaching, The Florida Magazine Association and, most recently, by the Tallahassee Community College Women's History Month Committee.*

*Sandy is passionate about ensuring that "wildness has a secure place in our collective future."*

## BECOME A MEMBER

### Join National Audubon Society and Apalachee Audubon!

For just \$20 a year you can be a member of both National Audubon and our local Apalachee Audubon chapter. Your membership will include *Audubon*, our bimonthly flagship publication. Each issue of this award-winning publication features beautiful photography and provocative journalism. Our chapter newsletter will keep you informed of local and statewide Audubon and other nature-related events.

You can pay for membership using a credit card by calling Audubon's toll free membership number. *(Please mention our chapter ID E-19 for us to get full credit for a new membership).*

1-800-274-4201

If you prefer to pay by check for an annual membership, send your \$20 check made payable to National Audubon Society and mail to:

National Audubon Society  
PO Box 422246  
Palm Coast, FL 32142-2246

Allow 4-6 weeks for arrival of your first issue of *Audubon*. The cost of membership is tax deductible except for \$7.50 (which is allocated to *Audubon* magazine).

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE *by Ed Gartner*

### LOOKING FOR AAS AWARD NOMINATIONS

All volunteers deserve our thanks, but some deserve special recognition. Do you know of someone who has been at the top of his or her game all year? Perhaps there is someone who has come through for Audubon for a sustained period of 20 years or more. Are you aware of a community member or a business, government agency or other organization that provided a special service, contribution or support for Apalachee Audubon's mission?



Any member can nominate a candidate for an award. The deadline this year is February 28<sup>th</sup>. For more information, visit our web site and click the awards link on the home page, or click "News" and select the AAS Awards Program.

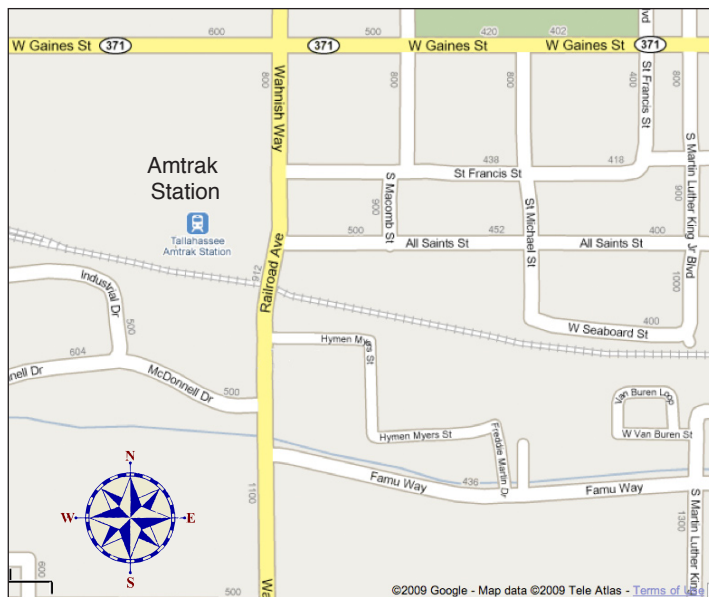
If you would like to nominate someone, please contact an AAS board member. Contact information is on the masthead on this page and on the AAS web site.

*(More in my series about misinformation in our next AAS Newsletter.)*

## AAS PROGRAM MEETING LOCATION

Historic Amtrak Station  
918 Railroad Avenue  
Tallahassee, Florida

*Note: A reminder that Gaines Street is undergoing construction and portions of the road will be closed between 7:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. Please allow extra time for potential detours.*



### Apalachee Audubon Society (AAS) 2009 – 2010 Officers and Board Members

|                        |                |                |
|------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>President:</b>      | Ed Gartner     | (850) 386-6543 |
| <b>Vice President:</b> | Harry Hooper   | (850) 668-0498 |
| <b>Secretary:</b>      | Lynn Reynolds  | (850) 421-1074 |
| <b>Treasurer:</b>      | Harvey Goldman | (850) 385-5222 |

#### Directors:

|                  |                |                         |
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| Ben Fusaro       | (850) 297-2052 | <i>(Past President)</i> |
| Jan Bordelon     | (850) 942-8078 |                         |
| Chris Borg       | (850) 893-4153 |                         |
| Ann Bruce        | (850) 224-4760 |                         |
| Melissa Forehand | (850) 510-4877 |                         |
| Karen Wensing    | (850) 386-7766 |                         |

**Newsletter Editor:** Kathleen Carr (850) 322-7910  
Newsletter is published 8 times yearly  
(Sept.-May, except December).

**Webmaster:** John Boutelle (850) 656-3346

Apalachee Audubon Society, Inc.  
P.O. Box 1237  
Tallahassee, FL 32303  
[www.apalachee.org](http://www.apalachee.org)

AAS is a 501(c)3 tax exempt organization. All contributions are tax deductible. Inquiries can also be sent to 76 Dogwood Forest Rd., Crawfordville, FL 32327-0588.

**Mission Statement:** Protection of the environment through education, appreciation, and conservation.

## BIRD BITS: THE RAIL COMPLEX *by Harry Hooper*

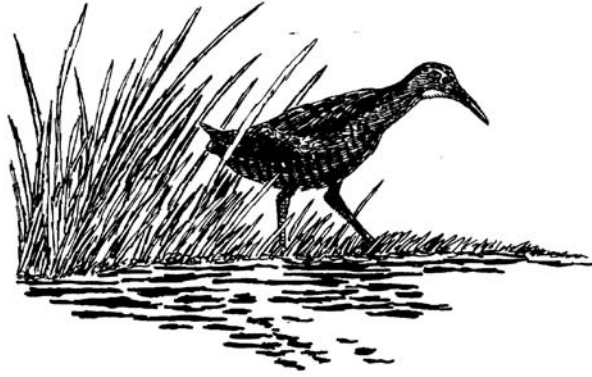
A bird of coastal marshes, swamps, and wet meadows, a bird that is very successful in avoiding human presence, a bird that nearly every birder deeply wishes to find but rarely discovers, the “Grail Rail” is one of six species of rails that are observed throughout the U.S. including Florida. Rail is the common name for approximately 62 species worldwide of the family Rallidae that also includes the American Coot, Common Moorhen, and Purple Gallinule.

The Yellow Rail, Sora, Black Rail, Clapper Rail, King Rail, and Virginia Rail make up the rail “complex” in the U.S. The Clapper, King, and Black rails are year round residents in Florida. The Sora, Virginia and Yellow rails are fall through spring visitors.

The word rail is derived from a French word that describes a scraping sound. Interestingly, the names of our rails have varied origins. Yellow and Black rails are named for their colors while the King is named for its royal appearance. The Clapper is named for its distinctive call that is similar to a clapping of hands. The Sora’s name is said to have originated from a Native American dialect. The Virginia Rail barely resides within its namesake state.

The six rails vary in size from approximately 6 inches to 15 inches in length. Bills are quite variable, long and slender to short and stubby. Their legs are relatively long for the size of these birds. Toes are long and slender to permit walking on the soft mud of the marsh. A fascinating aspect of a rail is that its body is relatively compressed laterally, an apparent adaptation for slinking through dense marsh grasses. The phrase “skinny as a rail” is quite appropriate for this bird. Cryptic plumage allows these birds to blend amazingly well with their environment as they slowly skulk in and out of the marsh edges. Rails are generally active during the early morning and at dusk, giving these birds an even greater degree of stealth to test the patient birder. Listening for whinnies, cackles, and clicks, suggestive of frogs or insects, often leads the avid birder to a rail’s location, but without the guarantees of a sighting.

Bottoms Road just north of Panacea is a great place to observe the two less-secretive species, the Clapper and Virginia Rails. Plan your visit during low tide early in the



*Virginia Rail by Steve D'Amato*

morning or late in the afternoon to enhance your chances of success. King, Yellow, and yes, even the “grail rail” a.k.a. Black Rail have been observed on Bottoms Road and Mashers Sands Road south of Panacea. The narrow water-filled ditches north of Headquarters Pond on the east side of Lighthouse Road in St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge are good locations to observe Sora. A little bit of advice though. Study the similarity of plumages

and habits especially of the larger rails before heading to the marsh. Their cryptic plumage, shyness, skulking, and quickness in concert with low light conditions will test a birder’s patience.



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**Melissa Forehand**

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(850) 576-0002 [tallahassee.wbu.com](http://tallahassee.wbu.com)

### 2010 AAS Program Speakers & Topics

|          |   |
|----------|---|
| March 25 | Donna Legare, <i>Planting for Wildlife</i><br>(Native Nurseries)  |
| April 22 | Fritz Davis, <i>Get the Facts and then Act: How Marjorie Harris Carr and the Florida Defenders of the Environment Stopped the Cross Florida Barge Canal</i><br>(Florida State University) |
| May 27   | <b>Annual Banquet</b><br>Dana Bryan, <i>Limpkins</i><br>(FL-Dept. of Environmental Protection)  |

Your membership expiration date is shown at top right above your name. For problems with membership, call the National Audubon Society Office at 1-800-274-4201. For problems with mailings, contact Pam Flynn at pflynn@us.ibm.com.

## APALACHEE AUDUBON SOCIETY CALENDAR: FEBRUARY-MARCH 2010

*Note: A reminder that Gaines Street is undergoing construction and portions of the road will be closed after 7:00 p.m.*

Social begins at 7:00, meeting at 7:30 p.m. Located at the historic Amtrak Station, 918 Railroad Avenue—map on page 2. For more information, call (850)510-4877 or visit: [www.apalachee.org](http://www.apalachee.org)

### Chapter/Audubon Events

#### February

- 13-15 Great Backyard Bird Count:** ID and count birds in your own yard, a park, retention pond, or join other Audubon members at Fran Rutkovsky's house or the staff at Maclay Gardens for a group counting effort. (See January issue for details.)
- 20 Backyard Wildlife Tour:** Backyard Wildlife Tour fund raiser at selected Tallahassee home sites.
- 27 Butterfly Garden Work Day:** Join Lynn Reynolds and Harry Hooper at the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge and help with planting and other tasks. Call or email Lynn for the schedule and details.

#### March

- 13 Tall Timbers Field Trip with Chris Borg**
- 21 Wakulla Springs Field Trip: George Apthorp** will lead a walking tour through several biological communities at the park. Begins at 8:30 a.m., ends around 12:30 p.m.

### Upcoming AAS Birding Field Trip

#### *Bird Hike at Tall Timbers*

**Saturday, March 13<sup>th</sup>, 8:00 a.m. - early afternoon**

**Hosted by:** Chris Borg

**Skill Level:** Expect moderate physical difficulty and intermediate to advanced birding.

**Cost:** Free, but donations to the bird program are welcome.

**Description:** Birding in the mixed pine uplands, hardwood bottomlands, and fields of tall timbers in search of wintering and migrating sparrows and other passerines. May see as many as eight species of woodpeckers.

**What to bring:** Binoculars, field guide, water/snacks, sunscreen, insect repellent, hat, sturdy walking shoes, dress for the weather.

**Chris Borg** is the conservation biologist with Tall Timbers Land Conservancy and has been birding for 20 years.

For more information details, contact Elizabeth Platt at (850) 284-0963 or [ejplatt@embarqmail.com](mailto:ejplatt@embarqmail.com).