

# APALACHEE AUDUBON SOCIETY



Apalachee Audubon Society Mission Statement:

Protection of the environment through education, appreciation, and conservation.

NEWSLETTER OF THE APALACHEE AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC.

SUMMER 2012

*Editor's note: We hope you'll enjoy our summer e-newsletter. This is a first! Special thanks to everyone who took time out from their summer activities and helped with this.*

## Debby Devastates Shorebird Nests along the Panhandle Coast By Alan Knothe

Audubon Florida Coastal Bird Conservation Coordinator



Near the end of June Tropical Storm Debby passed slowly along the Panhandle coast from Pensacola to the Big Bend. While sustained winds were only about 45 miles per hour, the storm dumped as much as 5 inches of rain per hour on some parts of the coast. Storm surge and flooding washed away nearly all the shorebird nests on Panhandle beaches. The only nests that survived were a few that were further back in the dunes where they were more protected from the bad weather, according to Raya Pruner the Florida Department of Environmental Protection shorebird biologist in Panhandle state parks. *Continued on page 3*

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*One nesting colony on the old St. George Island Causeway prior to the storm. (At top: American Oystercatcher Nest)*

## Apalachee Audubon Society, Inc.

2012 – 2013

### Officers & Directors

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All memberships and contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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### Please Save Used Postage Stamps to Help Injured Eagles!

Yes, it's true! All you have to do is cut postage stamps from your mail, leaving at least 1/4 inch of paper all around the stamp or just bring the envelope and I will trim them. Any postage stamp is useful—big, small, U.S. or foreign! The Audubon Center for Injured Birds of Prey in Maitland, FL collects used postage stamps and sells them to wholesalers for sale to collectors all over the world. There will be a box to collect them at Audubon meetings. If you have questions or want to arrange for a pickup, please call Eileen Boutelle at (850) 656-3346.

THANK YOU for helping injured eagles!



## You can join National Audubon Society and Apalachee Audubon for just \$20 a year!

Membership includes *Audubon*, our bimonthly flagship publication. Each issue of this award-winning publication features beautiful photography and engaging journalism. Our Apalachee Audubon chapter newsletter will keep you informed of local and statewide Audubon and other nature-related events and will share birding and conservation information and news.

You can pay for membership using a credit card by calling Audubon's toll free membership number, 1-800-274-4201. (*Please mention our chapter ID, E19, for AAS to get full credit for a new membership*). If you prefer to pay by check for an annual membership, send your \$20 check made payable to National Audubon Society (*please add Apalachee Audubon's chapter ID, E19*) and mail to:

National Audubon Society

PO Box 422246

Palm Coast, FL 32142-2246

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

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**Kathleen Carr with “Paige”  
at the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey**  
*Photo by Mac Stone*

## President’s Message In the Good Old Summertime By Kathleen Carr

Summer is the quiet season for our chapter, but behind the scenes we’re busy planning and preparing for the new program year that will kick off this September. As we transition into a new season of activities, I would like to thank our retiring board members for all their hard work during the 2011-2012 program year: **Leann Watts Williams, Selena Kiser, Mark Kiser, Ed Gartner, and Elizabeth Platt.**

This year, we are welcoming five new members to our board: **Nick Baldwin**, a local photographer, **Jan Bordelon**, a longtime AAS member who will be serving as Secretary; **Jim Cox**, Vertebrate Ecology Program Director at Tall Timbers Research Station; **Aubrey Heupel**, a student in the Entomology Master’s program at FAMU; and **Adrienne Ruhl**, who works at the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

I’m delighted to announce that board member **Seán McGlynn** is stepping in as Vice President and presumptive nominee for the 2013-2014 AAS Presidency. Other returning board members are: **Ben Fusaro, Harvey Goldman** as Treasurer, **Laurie Jones**, and **Julie Wraithmell.**

The Cajun-themed May banquet was marvelous! Thank you to **Tim Smith** for providing a delectable meal and to the volunteers who filled the dessert table with a marvelous selection of sweets. **Reinier Munguia**, President of the Lake Region Audubon Society, was a fascinating speaker with stories about his travels and wildlife rescues. His talk also carried a message of inspiration about the importance of wildlife and conservation education for a generation of children suffering from a deficit of nature-based experiences.

We announced three award recipients at the banquet and will be presenting the awards at the September program meeting. **John Boutelle** will receive the Presidential Recognition Award for his work in maintaining the AAS web site, and **Ann Bruce** and **Ed Gartner** will receive the Elizabeth J. Platt Service Award for their many hours of labor developing and sustaining the chapter’s butterfly garden at the St. Marks Wildlife National Wildlife Refuge.

Please plan to join us September 27 for our first program meeting where we’ll enjoy a potluck dinner and a movie. Bring your favorite dish to share. See you then!

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### Shorebird Nests along the Panhandle Coast *Continued from page 1*

Small islands such as Lanark Reef and the old St. George Island Causeway usually host many nesting birds from several species. This year was no exception, but this year these islands were completely washed over by the storm surge. No nests survived. Other areas such as St. George Island State Park and Gulf Islands National Seashore were badly flooded by the heavy rains.

There is still hope. Some birds, mostly Snowy Plovers, Wilson’s Plovers and Least Terns, have been observed courting and starting new nests. It is highly unlikely nest numbers will reach the numbers before the storm, but biologists are hopeful to have at least some productive nests this season. Birds will start new nests provided human disturbance is low and conditions for nesting are good. Audubon Shorebird Stewards are helping by working near nesting areas where they watch over the birds and keep disturbance down. You too can help. If you are interested in becoming a Shorebird Steward, please contact Alan Knothe at [aknothe@audubon.org](mailto:aknothe@audubon.org) or 850-710-6331.



*Least Tern Chick*



*A Summer Love Story*

He comes flying in  
with an offering of a fish  
which she accepts;  
then she says:  
“Follow me; let me show  
you a neat place to nest”  
and off they go together.



*Story & Royal Tern photos  
by  
Nick Baldwin*



## Birding the Summer Doldrums Documenting a Purple Martin Roost By Wayne Schaffner

*"The lure of the distant and the difficult is deceptive. The great opportunity is where you are." - John Burroughs*



*PUMA Roosting on Bridge at 9:20 p.m.*

I don't consider myself a person with favorites of any kind. As a bird watcher, I think it is fair to say that my favorite bird is whatever bird I am observing at a given moment. The same can be said of the books and stories I read. At the moment, my favorite story is "Journal Entry: Migrating Eastern Kingbirds" found in *Between Two Rivers: Stories From the Red Hills to the Gulf*.<sup>\*</sup> Reading this for the first time was an awakening for me about the promises of the natural world that are cyclically fulfilled in mid to late summer in our region.

The period of late June, through July and early August is often referred to as "the doldrums" in the birding world and it can be a brutal time to be out observing birds. The dazzling spring rush of migrating species has long since passed. The most obvious and regular activity of the resident breeding songbirds has grown quiet. I live in the Albany, Georgia area and I am often surprised while conducting Bachman's Sparrow surveys this time of year when the morning has nearly passed before I finally hear a Northern Parula. Surprise pelagic visitors or coastal birds or post-breeding wanderers often become the focus of attention on short notice. A few lingering migrant shorebirds will dot the local ponds and mudflats. Sometimes it is impossible to know if these shorebirds are spring stragglers or the first breeders who have already started south for the winter.

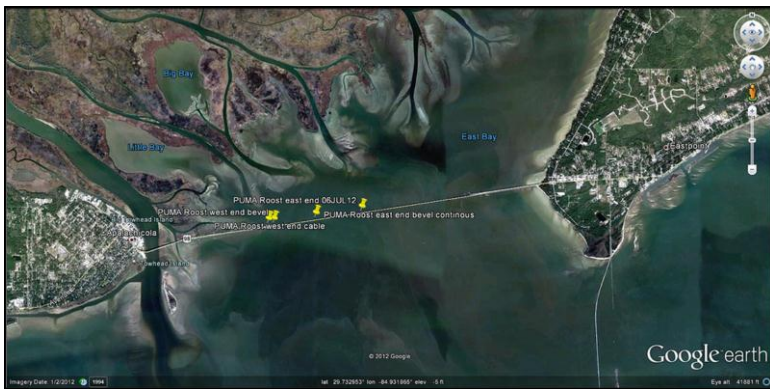
As "Migrating Eastern Kingbirds" showed me many years ago, we just need to look a little closer and in a different way for the miracles continuing to abound in a seemingly parallel and hidden universe of birds during the "doldrums". The birds are around but something is different. What are they doing? Well, when it comes to Purple Martins, once the young fledge and mature a bit, the Martins are on the move and staging in big numbers.

On Friday evening, June 22<sup>nd</sup>, while driving over the bridge between Eastpoint and Apalachicola about 9 p.m., I was startled by rising swarms of Purple Martins. Instinctively I slowed my truck. A mass of Martins thick as gnats passed over the bridge and a few darted unscathed across the path of my truck. As I coasted into Apalachicola I realized I had probably just witnessed Purple Martins coming to roost. According to the Purple Martin Conservation Association (PMCA) "A martin roost is where Purple Martins sleep at night" and "a martin roost may have from 1000-1,000,000 individuals, with numbers typically from 25,000 to 100,000. Most martin roosts are large enough to show up on Doppler weather radar as the birds leave in the morning".

It wasn't until Friday June 29<sup>th</sup> that I had an opportunity to witness the probable roost activity again. As I drove across the bridge at the same time, I witnessed the same activity. Since the birds were there in the dark again and in such large numbers I felt comfortable reporting this as a roost and submitted my first roost report to PMCA late that evening. The next morning I crossed the bridge about an hour before sunrise and saw similar activity around the west causeway. It was then I made a conscious decision to devote some time to documenting the roost. *Continued on page 6*

*Bridge Bevel in Daylight  
Photos by Wayne Schaffner*





*Google Earth View of Site*

## **Puma Roost** *Continued from page 5*

On the evening of July 4<sup>th</sup> after Shorebird Stewarding at St. George Island State Park I drove to the west causeway of the bridge. As I parked at the east end at 7:50 p.m. I did not see or hear any Martins. It was still daylight and sunset was at 8:44 p.m. that day. At 7:57 p.m. I heard the first few Purple Martins arriving and looked up and saw three fly in from the west. At 8:34 p.m. they were arriving in steady groups of 10; at 8:38 p.m. steady groups of 100 and starting to swarm. At 8:58 p.m. there were

1,000 swarming and by 9:01 p.m. I estimated 2,000 swarming overhead. All the birds were flying in from the west.

At 9:03 p.m. the birds grew silent. For a moment I wondered if I was premature filing the first Roost Report. Luckily, in the dark, I raised my binoculars and looked out towards the middle of the bridge. Even in the dark I could make out a huge blackish cloud of birds hovering at bridge deck level. Slowly, the sound of calling birds returned as they spread out along the bridge substructure towards the causeway. I was able to get some diagnostic photos using a 4-second exposure time. Late that night I filed my second Roost Report to PMCA. The next day I posted my first report to North Florida Birds (nflbirds) Yahoo Group. At that time I had no intuitive sense of how many birds were out there. I hadn't put a number in the PMCA Roost Report Form. Later in the nflbirds report I guessed possibly 100,000 Martins based on the density of the birds in the photograph and the length of the bridge.

In order to reasonably estimate the number of birds in the roost I had to get out on the water and measure the length of the roost, determine if Martins were roosting on both sides of the bridge and determine a reasonable density of Martins lined up on the bridge and if the birds were roosting on two cables suspended under the bridge. Friday, July 6<sup>th</sup> I drove down early to allow time to find a local person to pilot me out to the roost. I was glad I drove to Wefing's Marine just east of Magnolia Bluff for that is where I was blessed to make the acquaintance of Mark Stratton. Mark is a local oysterman part time and he is also a photographer which was an added bonus.

Mark has a 19-foot Aquasport that he retrofitted himself for oystering. It was the right boat for the job. We arrived near the middle of the bridge at 8:25 p.m. and saw the first Purple Martin. The arrival of the mass of the roost was similar to the earlier evening. For approximately thirty minutes we just watched the miracle unfold from a point about midway between the overhead power transmission lines and the bridge. After it appeared most of the Martins were roosted we set about collecting the rest of the information. We confirmed that the birds were only roosting on the north side of the bridge, roosting on the two cables and the bevel of the substructure, obtained GPS coordinates of the ends of the roost and motored the entire length of the roost from a distance that did not disturb the birds while monitoring the density of birds. We returned to the landing at a few minutes after 10 p.m. It was quite the piece of seamanship, in my opinion, in the dark on 2-4 foot swells amidst bridge pilings, power transmission superstructure, crab pot buoys and oyster bed buoys.

In the "Journal Entry: Migrating Eastern Kingbirds" the "secret garden" scene was Buckhorn Creek in western Wakulla County, Florida. One day I will paddle the creek and marvel at the spritely Eastern Kingbirds in mass. For now, Buckhorn Creek is my birding El Dorado and it reminds me to heed the call, bird the doldrums and seek out the miracles.

\***Between Two Rivers: Stories From the Red Hills to the Gulf** edited by Susan Cerulean, Janisse Ray, & Laura Newton; [www.redhillswritersproject.org](http://www.redhillswritersproject.org)  
 1. PMCA Roost Reports (06JUL12, 04JUL12, 29JUN12) latest report at top: <http://www.purplemartin.org/roost/roostdetail.php?roost=440>  
 2. North Florida Birds Yahoo Group (nflbirds) reports: 09JUL12 report for 06JUL12: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nflbirds/message/7941>; 05JUL12 report for 04JUL12: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nflbirds/message/7936>; 14JUL12 report for location and directions clarification: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nflbirds/message/7945>

## A Wood Stork Adventure at Birdsong Nature Center Reported by Pat Press and Carol Franchi

Early morning showers lightly dripping through the tall pines and fragrant magnolias greeted the excited group of birdwatchers and photographers at Birdsong Nature Center on Saturday, June 9th. We were all eager birdwatchers ready to take in the deep south swamp. On arriving we were greeted by our Birdsong guide. We then caravanned down through the bluebird meadows full of patches of blackberry bushes to the swampy pond where the wood storks were nesting with their two youngsters.



*Birdsong's Wood Stork Photos by Birdsong Volunteer Joe Peresich*

The guides and some local photographers had set up telescopes and cameras on tripods aimed at the wood stork nest which gave us a terrific view. These scopes provided us with an unbelievable and wondrous sight. The wood stork youngsters were braving the showers and light breezes in their huge nest at the top of a gigantic water tupelo tree. Surprisingly their nest was exposed to daily elements of extreme heat and often the usual spring afternoon thunderstorms. The parents shelter their nestlings under their huge wings to provide shade and protection on the ledge so high above the undergrowth.

In back of the wood stork nest was a nesting family of great blue herons. We could not see the nest; however we could hear their lively breakfast. The faithful birdwatchers listened with delight at the feeding sounds coming from the swamp nest. The parents flew in with breakfast and a loud cacophony of engaging screams, screeches and honks came flying back to our ears through the forest as the babies were being fed. Off to the right some white egret parents were swirling through the woods lifting high on the breezes of the approaching late spring storm. Off to the right and slightly below the storks were two anhinga. They surveyed the swamp and then flew off above the forest.

The wood stork nest is the first to be sighted at Birdsong, though others have nested at plantations in South Georgia. These beautiful birds are being pushed into this area from their usual breeding grounds in Florida due to habitat loss, according to our knowledgeable guide.

We enjoyed the opportunity to take in the sights and sound of nature and to take in the serenity of being in the forest. Take a short trip up Meridian Road into South Georgia and give yourself a birding treat!



For more information, please see [www.birdsongnaturecenter.org](http://www.birdsongnaturecenter.org) or call 1 (800) 953-BIRD. *Special thanks to Pat Press and Carol Franchi for sharing this lovely day with us and to Birdsong Volunteer Joe Peresich for the great photos.*

**Birdsong Nature Center**  
Some Upcoming Activities

**July 28 8-10 a.m.:** Summer Morning Trail Ride

**July 28 8:30 a.m.:** Bluebird Trail Monitoring

**August 1 9:30 a.m.-Noon:** Butterfly Garden

Work Day

**August 4 7:30-9:30 a.m.:** Early Morning Nature Walk

**August 11 9:30-11:30 a.m.:** Take a Child Outside for  
A Natural Scavenger Hunt



For information, please see [www.birdsongnaturecenter.org](http://www.birdsongnaturecenter.org)

To confirm attendance, please call 1 (800) 953-BIRD

*Birdsong Nature Center will be closed from August 18 until September 5<sup>th</sup>*

**Apalachee Audubon's St. Marks NWR**  
**Monarch Butterfly-Pollinator Garden**

We need your help!

If you would like to help with the  
St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge  
Monarch Butterfly Pollinator Garden,  
please contact Park Ranger David Moody  
at 850 925-6121 or

[david\\_moody@fws.gov](mailto:david_moody@fws.gov)



*Save the Date!*

*Help celebrate "Public Lands Day"*

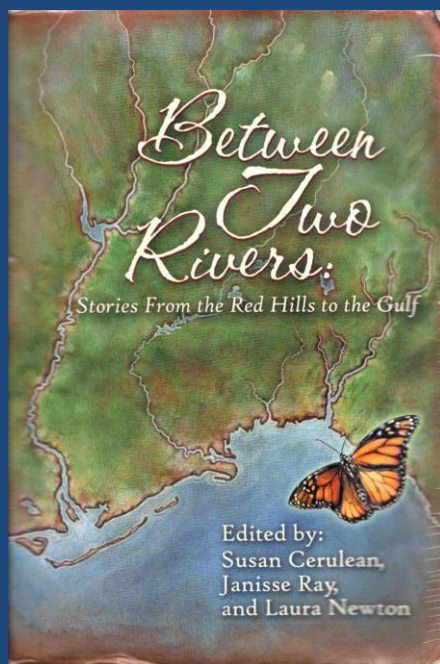
*September 29<sup>th</sup> Fee Free Day*

*Volunteer Orientation-Pollinator Garden Work Day-and more!*

*For information, please see:*

<http://www.stmarksrefuge.org/calendar.cfm>

*Please register ahead with David Moody- Thank You!*



**Between Two Rivers:**  
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**Red Hills to the Gulf,**  
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Janisse Ray,  
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*Wild Birds Unlimited,*  
*Tallahassee Museum of*  
*Florida History; in*  
*Apalachicola at Downtown*  
*Books; and in Thomasville*  
*at the Bookshelf.*

[www.redhillswritersproject.org](http://www.redhillswritersproject.org)

**National Moth Week**  
**July 23-29, 2012**



*Antheraea polyphemus*

*Photo by Fran Rutkovsky*

*National Moth Week is the first annual global event to celebrate moths and biodiversity. The goal for NMW is to coordinate "moth night" events that are already being held in various places on different dates. A Facebook moth-watching group with over 400 members contributed to the event's development.*

Currently there are 229 registered locations in 49 US states (only North Dakota is missing), 4 Canadian Provinces, Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia and 18 countries. Many of the registered locations have multiple moth nights. There are day-time events at public libraries with slide shows, evening slide show presentations and a day-time caterpillar hunt; private events, where people are getting together with family, friends and neighbors to look for moths in campgrounds, backyards and parks; and, solo observations on private properties.

*Join in the fun and check out the moth website as well as the Facebook group. With more than 10,000 moth species in North America alone, you just never know what you'll see at your porch light!*

<http://nationalmothweek.org>

Facebook: *Mothing and Moth-watching Group*

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/137219092972521/>

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# The BBEF Presents... 2012 Candidates' Environmental Forum

**What:** The Big Bend Environmental Forum and the League of Women Voters of Tallahassee are hosting a candidates' forum for local candidates (Tallahassee City Commission: Seats 1 and 2 and Leon County Commission At Large Seat 1) and for US Congress, House District 2.

Citizens will have the opportunity to suggest questions covering environmental, energy, sustainability, and growth management issues.

An open house prior to the forum will include displays by candidates and local environmental and civic organizations, and will provide an opportunity for voters to meet the candidates in person.

**When:** Thursday, July 26, 2012

**Time:** The forum will run from 6:30PM-9:00PM, and will be preceded by a candidate meet and greet at 5:45PM.

**Where:** Tallahassee City Hall, 300 S. Adams Street, City Commission Chambers, 2nd floor.

**Other:** On-street parking at metered spaces is free after 6PM, and parking is also available at nearby Klemm Plaza for a small charge.

For more information visit [www.bbef.org](http://www.bbef.org) or [www.facebook.com/bigbendEF](http://www.facebook.com/bigbendEF)

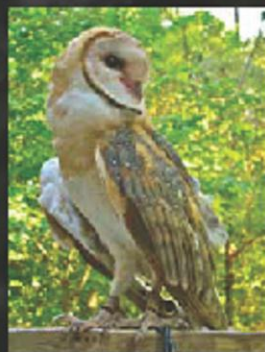
*The BBEF is an alliance of local environmental and conservation organizations in the Big Bend area, which have come together to conserve the region's environmental qualities through education, advocacy, research, and networking among its members. For more information, visit [www.bbef.org](http://www.bbef.org).*

*The League of Women Voters works to build citizen participation in the democratic process and enables people to seek positive solutions to public policy issues through a process of study, consensus, and advocacy. For more information visit [www.LWVTallahassee.org](http://www.LWVTallahassee.org) and [www.vote411leon.org](http://www.vote411leon.org).*

TFS, in partnership with St. Francis Wildlife, will host its 2012 edition of  
**BIRD NIGHT** at All Saints Cinema

Ms. Sandy Beck, Education Director for St. Francis Wildlife, will be at All Saints Cinema  
with two special feathered creatures.

PRECEDING THE  
FILM "OWLS ARE  
THE TIGERS OF  
THE SKY", SANDY  
WILL PRESENT  
TWIGGY, A MALE  
BARNOWL.



PRIOR TO OUR  
ANNIVERSARY  
SHOWING OF  
'KESTREL'S EYE,'  
SANDY WILL  
INTRODUCE US TO  
RHETT, A MALE  
AMERICAN  
KESTREL.

TFS first showed "Kestrel's Eye" in 2002 and is bringing it back 10 years later for those who missed it. "Owls are the Tigers of the Sky" is a short film about North Florida's four native owl species and the special adaptations that make them spectacular nocturnal hunters.

**PROCEEDS FROM THIS SPECIAL DOUBLE-BILLED FILM EVENT WILL  
BE SHARED WITH ST. FRANCIS WILDLIFE.**

Saturday, August 4

5:00 PM & 7:30 PM

\$10 general admission and \$8 for  
TFS members and students (one  
ticket for both films)



For timely updates about fieldtrips and other events, please subscribe to the AAS notification email list via our website: [www.apalachee.org/List\\_Serving.html](http://www.apalachee.org/List_Serving.html) or here: [www.groups.google.com/group/apalachee-audubon](http://www.groups.google.com/group/apalachee-audubon)

For information about your membership call the National Audubon Society at 1-800-274-4201 or go to the 'Member Center' at [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org). For questions about mailings, contact Pam Flynn at [tallypfly57@yahoo.com](mailto:tallypfly57@yahoo.com)