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See us on Facebook and CHOCTAWHATCHEEAUDUBON.ORG. For newsletters by e-mail send your e-mail address to Kay Parsons at: parsonskg1@cox.net

President's Message

I wanted to take a moment to address some changes that have taken place at the Choctawhatchee Audubon Society. Recently our president Walt Spence resigned. Walt had served CAS for many years, and he always did an outstanding job as our president and in the many other ways he served CAS. He will definitely be missed. As vice president, I have assumed the duties of the president. I have been associated with CAS for 25 years now, and I have served on the board as bird count coordinator, vice president and president in the past. I hope I am able to serve you well. If I do half as good a job as Walt, I will be an excellent president.

For those of you that don't know me I am a biologist. I spent most of my adult life working in the field of environmental education. Education is very important to me, and I am hoping to make it a central part of the CAS mission. I believe that education about birds and nature must extend past the classroom into the field for it is in the field that we truly connect to nature, that we learn to love it. And once we love it, we protect it. I plan to offer educational field trips and classes in the near future so be on the lookout.

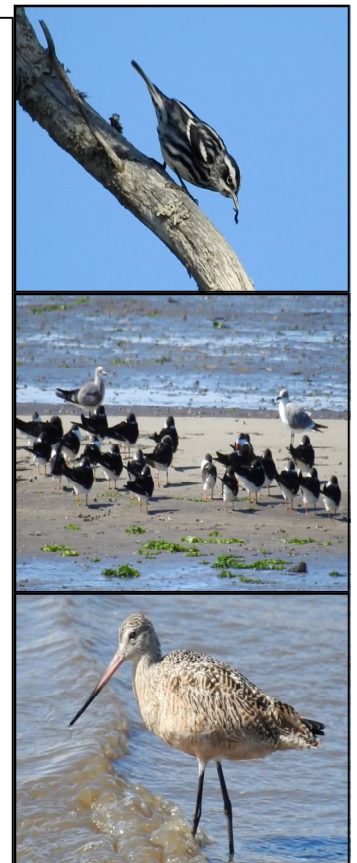
Our other officers are treasurer Elena Roser and secretary Dee Nickerson. We currently need a new vice president. We are also blessed with many others on our board in appointed positions: Programs Don Baltz, Publicity Gary Parsons & Lenny Fenimore, Newsletter Kay Parsons, Membership Dee Nickerson, Web master Malcolm Swan, Facebook Michele Rachie, Activities Margaret Benner, and Hospitality Phyllis Cheney. I am looking forward to working with this outstanding board. I know we will continue to have an excellent chapter.

Alan Knothe, President

Choctawhatchee Audubon Society Retreat to Cedar Key 12-14 Feb 2016

Thirteen intrepid birders departed Okaloosa County in a gale force westerly for the five-hour drive to Cedar Key, but, as we arrived, the wind let up, making for an absolutely gorgeous weekend. Our quarters, at Park Place in Cedar Key, overlooked the city park and beach, providing us with a view of numerous flocks of shorebirds (like Black Skimmers and Marbled Godwits) while we enjoyed happy hour and hors d'œuvres in the Benner's room. The next morning we rendezvoused at the Cedar Key Cemetery, which sports an elevated walk along 300 yards of marshy shoreline and rocky oyster mounds upon which courting (singing!) American Oystercatchers strutted. Birds were everywhere in great diversity and numbers. The cemetery grounds are high and blanketed with pines, oaks and ground cover. Here, we found woodpeckers, warblers (including Yellow-throated and Black-and-white) and a good assortment of passerines. Later that day we birded by boat, hiring Tidewater Tours (Guide Connie and Captain Mike) to visit the shorelines of Atsena Otie and Seahorse keys of the Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge. Very low tide made navigation tricky, but on Seahorse Key we encountered hundreds of shorebirds, including 70 Red Knots that were Knot that, after all. Our videographer, on further review, rescinded his ID the next morning, trading in knots for Short-billed Dowitchers. The same recording, however, documented two guys and their healthy dog chasing birds off the island, in violation of NWR rules. After lunch, some of us rested, and others prowled local birding sites, building our count to 72 species. We split up for dinner with those going to Robinson's Seafood, enjoying an excellent all-you-can-eat seafood dinner for \$13.95. Some of us continued birding Sunday, searching the Cedar Key Scrub State Reserve for Florida's only endemic bird, the Florida Scrub-Jay. Striking out, we continued northward to the Lower Suwannee National Wildlife Refuge and Shell Mound for ducks and raptors. We concluded with a big round of applause to Margaret Benner for an outstanding job organizing this venture and to Lenny Fenimore for leading us to the birding hotspots.

Reported by Gary and Malcolm



Schedule of Events:

February 27: Bird Walk at FWB Landfill. Alan Knothe, Choctawhatchee Audubon Society President and resident birding expert, will lead a walk at the FWB landfill, an area noted for its abundance and diversity of birds. Meet at Pepitos, 1313 N Lewis Turner Blvd, FWB at 7:30. Dress for the weather, wear closed toed shoes and bring binoculars. Call Alan for more details at 850 208-1780.

March 3: MONTHLY MEETING: Choctawhatchee Audubon Society Program “The Biology of Marine Birds” by Professor Emeritus Don Baltz, Louisiana State University. Dr. Baltz will explore the biology of the four primary groups of marine birds, Sphenisciformes (Penguins), Procellariiformes (Albatrosses and relatives), Pelecaniformes (Cormorants and relatives), and Charadriiformes (Gulls and relatives). These groups include about 275 species distributed around the world. Each group shares unique characteristics, but families and species within each group make a living in the marine environment in diverse ways. Many other species, which are considered secondary marine birds, use the marine environment in some manner but breed and rear their young in freshwater systems. The meeting will be held in Room 130 of the new Student Services Building at Northwest FL State College main campus in Niceville. Socializing begins at 6:30 PM, and the program begins at 7:00. Admission is free and open to the interested public. Call or e-mail Dr Don Baltz at 225 252-2760, dbaltz46@yahoo.com for more information.

March 12: Bird Walk at South Walton Courthouse and Local Area. Join Dee Nickerson for a pleasant walk through the trails around the Courthouse to search for early migrants and warblers, lunch afterwards. Meet at the BWB Winn Dixie parking lot at 7:30 a.m. or the South Walton courthouse at 8:15. For additional information contact Dee at 850-499-9269

March 19: Field trip to 7 Pines Nursery. Travel to North Walton County to see a native plant nursery and farm. Meet at the Niceville CVS parking lot at 7:30 and drive North on HY 285, turn right on HY 90, then left at HY 331 and go 6 miles. Turn right on HY 192 and at 2 miles, look for signs on the right. For additional information contact Dara Dobson at 850-830-8996.

March 26: Field Trip to Eglin Reservation. Join experienced birder Malcolm Swan and search for Bachman’s Sparrows and colonies of Red Cockaded Woodpeckers on Eglin Reservation. Participants **must** purchase a recreation permit from Jackson Guard prior to the event date. This can be done online, by visiting JacksonGuard.com. Meet at the Air Force Armament Museum parking lot at 7:00 a.m. For additional information, contact Malcolm Mark Swan at 210-343-9082.

April 7: MONTHLY MEETING: Retired Federal Fishery Biologist Dave Clausen will present a program on the flora and fauna of Lord Howe Island, a U.N. World Heritage Site off the coast of eastern Australia. Clausen visited the island in 2015 and will report on many of the unique, endemic species of wildlife.

The meeting will be held in Room 130 of the new Student Services Building at Northwest FL State College main campus in Niceville. Socializing begins at 6:30 PM, and the program begins at 7:00. Admission is free and open to the interested public. Call or email Dr Don Baltz at 225 252-2760, dbaltz46@yahoo.com. For more information

April 16: Bird Walk at Veteran’s Park Okaloosa Island: Join expert birder Malcolm Mark Swan for a leisurely walk around a park that supports an amazing diversity of species including a Great Blue Heron rookery. Wear closed toe shoes, bring binoculars and camera. Meet at the NE corner of the Convention Center Parking lot at 7:30. Contact Malcolm at 210 343-9082 for more information.

April 23: Estuary Festival at Fred Gannon Rocky Bayou State Park: Spend a great day at the park teaching your kids the wonders of bird identification (with the help of Choctawhatchee Audubon). The Park is East of Niceville off HY 20 just across from Rocky Bayou bridge. Many displays/venues will be available so check the Festival website for details.

Please note that the interested public is invited to all of the above events. Children are permitted if they are supervised by their parents.



2015 Christmas Bird Count

By Alan Knothe, Bird Count Coordinator

The Christmas Bird Count this year was very successful. It was held on December 14, 2015. We had 15 teams go into the field this year totaling 45 birders. Many started before dawn and ended after dusk. We tallied 137 species and counted 15,061 individual birds. We traveled 42 miles by foot, 379 miles by car and 4 miles by boat. Some of the more unusual species found include American white pelicans which were actually seen by 3 groups. An anhinga, rare locally, was found in Destin. Three snow geese were seen at the Wright Landfill and again at the adjacent sewage treatment facility. Both black and surf scoters were seen in Destin, and a lone ruddy duck was found in Valparaiso. Two Swainson's hawks were seen at the Okaloosa County Sewage Treatment Facility. Four species of rails were counted including 2 clapper rails, 2 king rails, 4 Virginia rails and 6 sora. A common gallinule was also found at the Wright Landfill. Eight snowy plovers were found on Okaloosa Island and another four in Destin. A Franklin's gull was found in

Destin. Two groups found red-cockaded woodpeckers bringing the total for this endangered species to 5 for this year's count. An eastern wood peewee, very rare this time of year was found in Destin. Two western kingbirds were found in north Fort Walton Beach, and three scissor-tailed flycatchers were seen at the Wright Landfill. A single winter wren was also found in Destin. Four golden-crowned kinglets were found on Eglin reservation. Nine species of warblers were found this year including 2 American redstarts found on the reservation and a black-throated green and a Wilson's warbler both found at the landfill. Nine rusty blackbirds were found by the group covering White Point.

One success story of note concerns the bald eagle. I can remember 25 years ago, when I first started doing Christmas Bird Counts, we were lucky to find even one bald eagle in the entire count circle. This year I counted 4 bald eagles just in my section, and there were another 16 found in other areas of the circle for a total of 20. It's nice to see at least one species on the rise.

It was a long day, but it was filled with fun and excitement just like any day in the field with the birds...



American White Pelican



Anhinga



Black Scoter



Surf Scoter



Ruddy Duck



Swainson's Hawk



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Choctawhatchee Audubon Society Membership

Name: _____ Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Introductory New Member- \$20.00 Individual Member Renewal- \$35.00

When you join you will be part of national, state, and local Audubon groups and will receive...

- Audubon magazine
- Florida Naturalist Magazine
- Our local Shorelines newsletter by e-mail
- Inclusion in Audubon of Florida's advocacy network
- Discounts at Audubon Sanctuaries and Nature Centers
- Opportunities for Audubon Ecology Camps and specially priced travel adventures

To join, mail this form and a check, payable to National Audubon Society, to;

Audubon National, PO Box 422250, Palm Coast, FL 32142-2250

CAS ONLY memberships are available and include A SHORELINES NEWSLETTER ONLY TO THOSE THAT INCLUDE THEIR E-MAIL ADDRESS ON MEMBERSHIP FORM.

To join CAS **ONLY** mail this form and a check payable to CAS to; *P.O. Box 1044 Niceville, FL 32578*

New Member e-mail Newsletter Only- \$10.00 Renewal Member Newsletter Only- \$10.00

FL Dept of Agriculture REG # CH4619 A copy of the Official registration and financial information may be obtained from the division of consumer services by calling toll-free (800-435-7352) within the state. Registration does not imply endorsement, approval, or recommendation by the state.

Chapter Code: COZE110Z

A great big THANK YOU to all CAS sponsors !
Donations are welcome, and all contributions are tax-deductible. Feel free to specify a particular fund/event that you'd wish to sponsor.

Choctawhatchee Audubon Society
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