



The Pelican Island Audubon Society

Peligram

- founded in 1964 to serve Indian River County -

P.O. Box 1833, VERO BEACH, FL 32961 772-567-3520 Fax 772-567-3521 www.pelicanislandaudubon.org
Our 43rd Year Vol. 43 No. 2 February 2007

Our Mission: To preserve and protect the animals, plants, and natural communities in Indian River County through advocacy, education, and public awareness.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

More information on all these events may be found at www.pelicanislandaudubon.org

Sun Feb 11 – 8:00am to 12:00pm ORCA canoe trip. Meet at the FMEL boathouse 200 9th St. S.E. (Oslo Rd.) east of U.S.1. Reservations are required. Call 772-567-3520 to sign-up.

Mon Feb 19 – 7:30pm general meeting, Vero Beach Community Center, 2266 14th Ave. Topic: *Hurricanes with Dr. Ed Proffitt.*

Sun March 4 – 8:00am-12:00pm ORCA canoe trip. Meet at the FMEL boathouse 200 9th St. S.E. (Oslo Rd.) east of U.S.1. Reservations are required. Call 772-567-3520 to sign-up.

Sat March 10 – 9:00am-4:00pm Pelican Island Wildlife Festival, Riverview Park, Sebastian

March 23-25 Third Annual Audubon Academy at Eckerd College, St. Petersburg, see page 2 for details.

HOLIDAY APPEAL UPDATE

As of late January, almost 100 PIAS members have generously donated almost \$5,000 toward covering our expenses for 2007. We wish to thank everyone who has donated so far. Every little bit helps!



ILL WINDS: HURRICANE STUDIES IN HONDURAS, FLORIDA, AND LOUISIANA GENERAL MEETING FEBRUARY 19

Dr. Ed Proffitt will be the guest speaker at the February 19 General Meeting to be held at 7:30 p.m. at the Vero Beach Community Center, 2266 14th Avenue. He will discuss his studies of hurricane impacts and recovery in the mangroves and salt marshes of Honduras (Mitch 1998), Florida (Charley 2004, Wilma 2005), and Louisiana (Katrina and Rita 2005). Some general information about adaptation to hurricanes by these systems will also be discussed. One study also includes an assessment of the influences of salt marsh snails and fiddler crabs on the rate and extent of recovery of salt marsh vegetation.

Dr. Proffitt was the first faculty member hired in April 2005 for the new Florida Atlantic University – Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution partnership in marine research and education. He is an associate professor in the FAU Department of Biological Sciences and specializes in estuarine ecology, plant-animal interactions, hurricane ecology, studies of restoration success, and ecological genetics. He teaches a graduate course in experimental design and biological statistics, and an undergraduate course in marine ecology (in the FAU-HBOI Semester-by-the-Sea program). He took a B.S. degree from the University of Miami, M.S. from East Carolina University (maritime forest and salt marsh biogeochemistry and ecology), and Ph.D. from the University of South Florida (responses of marine invertebrates in Tampa Bay to ecosystem disturbance).

PHOTO CREDIT: Hurricane Francis damage on Main Street in Sebastian. Image by Richard Baker.

Pelican Island Audubon Society

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Population explosion to the south; population explosion to the north What will this mean for Indian River County?

IRC is being squeezed!

On our north -

**City of Palm Bay, north of Fellsmere - 2020 estimate
250,000-300,00**

Robert Loring, Palm Bay Development Dept:
"Our 2004 official estimate was 176,152 but now that the city is annexing land, we are anticipating this new estimate."

Brevard County – 2025 estimate 681,913

BEBR 2001 estimate, before Palm Bay's annexations and development

Indian River County 2025: 167,200

On our south -

**Town of Cloud Grove, a new town planned for NW
St. Lucie County - Mid-2030s 12,000 homes and 3.2
million square feet commercial space**

Press Journal, Sunday January 7, 2006.

St. Lucie County – 2006: 259,315 2015: 350,173

Larry Dawm, St. Lucie County Planning Department "The 2015 estimate includes only 10% of Cloud Grove's total development."

IT'S IN THE PIAS LIBRARY BY TINA MARCHESE

January---a new year and most of us are settling back, taking it easy after a busy Christmas time. Not so a special group of ultra-ardent birders! For them, January 1st is the beginning of a year of madcap, tumultuous, competitive birding in a race to find and identify the largest number of species in 365 days. In **THE BIG YEAR**, a tale of man, nature, and fowl obsession, prize-winning environmental journalist Mark Obmascik chronicles the extreme adventures of three obsessive birders during their 1998 quests for the honor of chalking up the highest number of confirmed, identified species. This is a humorous, well written true story of rivalry, cross-continental treks, disappointments, and triumphs in the grueling year-long contest, which ended with one man achieving a record 745 different species. A copy of this gripping story is on the shelf at 598.07234 Obm. Check out this fast, unique read in the PIAS library.

AUDUBON ACADEMY 2007

Audubon Academy will be held March 23-25 at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg. This low-cost event is designed to strengthen chapter leadership by providing tools for effective chapter governance, communications, fundraising, conservation, and community involvement. The Academy is supported by the Florida Chapters, Audubon of Florida, and the National Audubon Society. Learn more by visiting www.audubonofflorida.org

CAN YOU NAME THIS BIRD?



The male inflates his throat sack into a large bright red balloon during his courtship. Female has white breast and undersides. What magnificent flyers with 5-8 foot stream lined wings and long forked tail! Searching for food by soaring over the sea, they dive for and catch with their long hooked bill, fish, crustaceans, and jellyfish from the surface. Extremely agile, able to execute sharp turns in pursuit of other large seabirds in flight until they drop or disgorge their catch, catching it in midair. This kleptoparasitic behavior gives them the name Man-o'-war or Pirates of the Sea. Fairly common this month on the Indian River Lagoon, we've seen a number soaring and roosting communally. Breeds on the Dry Tortugas off the Florida Keys.

Answer: Magnificent Frigatebird

BEYOND THE BEACH, IT'S NOT ALL BUSHES

"There are two parts to Indian River County, the beach and the bush.... This (latter) piece of property is completely useless to me as a taxpayer." This was a comment made by a speaker during the public discussion of the purchase of development rights of the 462 acre Sexton Ranch for \$12 million at the January 16th County Commission meeting,

WHOA! Doesn't this guy understand the long-term value of our western lands? Does he care where his food and water come from, especially in this era of terrorism and contaminated food?

The U.S. now imports more food than it grows. Moreover, next year for the first time more than half of the Earth's people will live in cities and not rural areas.



A Tale of Two Ranches - The Sexton and Adams. If the county's commissioners approve the purchase of the Sexton Ranch development rights on February 20th, there will be many benefits for our County:

- **Preserves agriculture.** The ranch will remain in agriculture no matter who owns it and there will be no additional houses. Over the years, the ranch has been managed for the long haul producing enough beef @ 60 lbs/yr/ person to feed 3000 people.
- **Provides free land management.** The owners will continue to manage the land wisely at no cost to the county. The Soil & Water Conservation District awarded Ralph Sexton the Conservationist of the Year for 2006 as model stewards of the land.
- **County receives income.** The Sextons or future owners will continue to pay property taxes, currently ~\$10,000.
- **Preserves taxpayer monies.** Cows don't go to school or drive cars. It is estimated that for every \$1.00 of potential tax revenue, if the land were developed, the cost of services would be \$1.56 for residential developments while services costs are \$0.07 for agricultural lands and \$0.03 for open lands (Source: Farming for the Future Inc. of Boca Raton, 1994). Thus residential properties cost counties far more due to service and infrastructure costs for schools, roads, bridges, water, sewers, police, fire, mosquito protection, and other general government expenditures.

- **Preserves environment.** Habitat for wildlife will be preserved because 25% of the property is wetlands and hammock.
- **Conserves water.** The open land captures and replenishes precious groundwater with rainwater that developed land would not; and there is minimal water consumption.
- **Preserves history.** The ranch and buildings are historical and our county has few of these treasures left.

These benefits exactly fit the criteria of the \$50 million bond referendum for land acquisition, approved by 67% of the voters in 2004. The approval effort, led by PIAS and others, authorized bond money to be spent on historic, agricultural, and environmental lands. During the lead-up to the vote, the Sexton Ranch was used an example of agriculture lands to be considered.

An alternative approach to buying development rights to save green space is being proposed in St. Lucie County called the Rural Land Stewardship program, where development rights are transferred from one property to another. In the case of the Adams ranch, the development rights of part of the Adam's Ranch are removed, to preserve a part of it, and are transferred to a new subdivision called Cloud Grove, on the St. Lucie/Indian River County line. The transfer allows even higher density (12,000 more houses) than the original land use plan. Cloud Grove is not yet approved by the state, and may be in trouble for having too high a density.

Compared with the St. Lucie County approach to land conservation, our county's negotiated price of \$12 million for the development rights of the Sexton ranch is a reasonable deal. This is especially so considering the highly likely, long-term increases in land prices. Unfortunately, one of the arguments against the purchase is that this will be the first major acquisition with county bond funds that will not receive state matching funds. In fact, there is an existing program that could serve this role called the Rural and Family Lands Protection Act, passed in 2004. The problem is that it has not yet been funded by the state legislature. We must make every effort to see that our State Rep. Stan Mayfield, the House Appropriation Committee Chair, and our Senator, Ken Pruitt, this year's Florida Senate President (both holding key positions) support this program so state money could help pay for the Sexton Ranch purchase as well as other suitable agricultural lands. This statute's purpose is to "Protect one acre of agricultural land for every acre lost to development." The Sexton Ranch is a great example where the state and county could partner together to preserve this agricultural land unto perpetuity. *Continued on page 4* ➔

Pelican Island Audubon Society
P.O. Box 1833
Vero Beach, FL 32961-1833

➔ **Beyond the Beach continued from page 3**

To support the purchase of the Sexton Ranch development rights: Email your County Commissioners:
Sandra Bowden sbowden@ircgov.com,
Gary Wheeler gwheeler@ircgov.com,
Wesley Davis wdavis@ircgov.com,
Peter O'Bryan pobryan@ircgov.com,
Joe Flescher jflescher@ircgov.com

To fund the Rural and Family Lands Protection Act:
Write or call Rep. Stan Mayfield, 222 The Capitol, 402 South Monroe St. Tallahassee, FL 32399 or 1053 20th Place, Vero Beach, FL 32960 Telephone (850)488-0952 or (772)778-5077 and Sen. Ken Pruitt, 1850 SW Fountainview Blvd., Suite 200, Port St. Lucie, FL 34986-3443 Telephone(772)344-1140

Richard Baker, President

Indian River County Background Facts on County's agriculture and land use:

- **1500s**-Spanish plant orange trees and introduce swine. Our county's non-Native American agriculture begins, which is soon followed by sugarcane (used in the manufacture of rum).
- **1800s**-Pineapples, vegetables, cattle, and the harvesting of seafood shipped to the north. Florida land is particularly valuable since the growing season is long and the plants do well.
- **1900s**-Our roads, canals, taxing system, commerce, politics, social fiber, and modifications of the lands developed for agriculture based on producing and shipping food principally to the Northeast.
- **1919** Riomar developed. The wealthy find paradise.
- **1925** McKee Jungle Gardens makes Vero an attractive tourist stop. Later funds were spent developing parks to preserve our disappearing beaches for the growing tourism.
- **1939** 105 Farms in Vero Beach; 98 in Winter Beach, 56 in Gifford, and 44 in Fellsmere). Farmers also recognized the beauty of the lands (illustrated in Highwaymen and Sean Sexton's paintings).
- **1980s** Rapid development, loss of green space--35 foot building height limits maintained by insightful county leaders slowed urbanization compared to counties north and south.
- **1992** First bond referendum for \$26 million to purchase conservation lands enacted by alarmed citizens-Matching state funds purchased over \$56 million worth of environmental lands.
- **2004** Second bond referendum for \$50 million includes agricultural and historical lands.

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BECOME A MEMBER OF THE PELICAN ISLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY

Membership benefits include subscriptions to *Audubon* magazine, *Florida Naturalist*, and the PIAS newsletter *The Peligram*. Additionally, members have full borrowing privileges to the PIAS nature library and much more!

\$20 one-year membership

Donation \$ _____

\$20 Friend (receive *The Peligram* only)

Check box if a *MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL*.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

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Please send your name and address along with a check payable to the "**Pelican Island Audubon Society**" to: Pelican Island Audubon Society, P.O. Box 1833, Vero Beach, FL 32961