

Pelican Island Audubon Society

Peligrum

- founded in 1964 to serve Indian River County -



P.O. Box 1833, VERO BEACH, FL 32961 772-567-3520 www.pelicanislandaudubon.org

Our 45th Year Vol. 45 No. 2 February 2009

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

Mirage: Florida and the Vanishing Water of the Eastern U.S. with Cynthia Barnett

February 16, 2009 • 7:30 p.m. • Vero Beach Community Center

Cynthia Barnett, author of the award-winning book *Mirage: Florida and the Vanishing Water of the Eastern U.S.*, will be the featured speaker at the February 16, 2009 general meeting of the Pelican Island Audubon Society starting at 7:30 p.m. in the Vero Beach Community Center, 2266 14th Avenue. Pelican Island Audubon invites the public to hear her presentation on water sustainability and the future of Florida from her book *Mirage*, which the St. Petersburg Times calls “one of the most important books to hit our state in a very long time.”

In the 19th Century, Floridians were determined to rid the land of water, never imagining how sorely we would someday miss 9 million acres of wetlands drained statewide. In the 20th Century, we viewed our aquifers underground as endless, handing out water permits to anyone who asked for one, never imagining a time when our once-abundant groundwater resources would no longer be sustainable for future supply. Population growth and economic prosperity, she argues, need not follow the increasing-demand, mega-infrastructure path of the last century. In the 21st Century, for the first time in its history, Florida has a chance to forge a sustainable water path. Will we do it?

Cynthia Barnett is senior writer at Florida Trend magazine, where she has worked for 10 years covering investigative, environmental, public policy and business stories earning numerous journalism prizes. Barnett earned her bachelor’s degree in journalism and master’s in American history with a specialization in environmental history, both from the University of Florida. In 2004, she spent a year studying freshwater supply through a Knight-Wallace Fellowship at the University of Michigan. *Mirage: Florida and the Vanishing Water of the Eastern U.S.* won the Gold medal for best nonfiction in the Florida Book Awards. Learn more at her web site: <http://www.cynthiabarnett.net/>

Cynthia Barnett’s book, *Mirage*, will be on sale at the meeting.

Join us for light refreshments after the program.

Night view of old windmill-powered well at Treasure Hammock Ranch
(www.floridacattleranch.org) by Bob Montanaro.



The 2009 Economic Slump and Our Water Supplies

The "silver-lining" of the current economy is the slowdown in development; but should officials base their planning on it? *by Deborah Ecker*

My concern is that the current lull in housing construction and its accompanying slowdown in water consumption are masking what could well be a long range trend in our county's population growth, an increase in population that could outstrip the capacity of our county's water resources.

It was barely a year ago when consultants to the county's utility department reported that the demand for water could be met only until 2017 – only 8 years from now. With the current economic stall, county planners think shortfall will not come until 2025. They have put on hold any planning for new water sources. That in my opinion is a gamble they should not be taking.

The city of Vero Beach and the county withdraw our drinking water from underground aquifers. Aquifers range from a few hundred feet of gravel near the surface, to layers of limestone and rocks thousands of feet deep, created millions of years ago. Vero Beach's water comes mostly from that top gravelly level. Water delivered to most of the county can be described as "fossil water," because it is pumped from fissures in ancient rocks many hundreds of feet deep.

We can have a water shortfall inspite of the fact that historically this area has had above-average rain fall. It was to get rid of too much water that the many miles of drainage ditches and canals were dug. We do not have reservoirs so last August's Tropi-

cal Storm Fay moved millions of gallons of water into the Lagoon and out to sea. Frequent light rains would have done a better job of recharging our surface water, which we need. Unfortunately weathermen say the outlook for this part of Florida is drought.

Those who came before us, one hundred years ago, drained the marshes. Now there is evidence that we may be having rainfall shortages caused by rising land temperatures from the loss of those marshes and the construction of roads and parking lots. There are huge economic pressures to build more – to wipe out the orange groves to build dense residential communities, even "New Towns." Before approving new developments our elected officials should think hard about where the water is going to come from to service those new residents.

While we are surrounded by water – in the lagoon, the ocean and the aquifer beneath -- all this water is salty. Desalinization plants are extremely costly. It could be that the best new water resource would be the system of ditches and drainage canals we already have. Nature's original layout could be restored; water could be caused to flow west instead of into the Lagoon. It could be stored in man-made marshes, or open reservoirs. Whatever new water resource solution is determined to be best, it will take time to get approval from all the political entities, to be engineered and constructed. In my opinion, these steps should not be postponed. *From a radio interview conducted on January 14, 2009.*

12th Annual Backyard Bird Count February 13-16, 2009

Discover the birds in your backyard, schoolyard or park. It's fun, it's free, and it helps the birds! All ages and skills welcome. Learn more at www.birdcount.org

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The Peligram, our newsletter, reaches over 900 people. Take advantage of this unique opportunity to reach a whole new audience at the rates quoted below.

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Contact information

Office: 772-567-3520 • Email: piaudubon@bellsouth.net

Website: www.pelicanislandaudubon.org

Mail: P.O. Box 1833, Vero Beach, FL 32961

February Field Trip *with Rick Lucas*

February 21, 2009—Viera Wetlands. Carpoolers meet at McDonalds located at I-95 and County Road 512 (Sebastian/Fellsmere exit). We will leave McDonalds promptly at 6:30am. Directions: I-95 North to Wickam Road Exit in Melbourne, West to end. All vehicles must be registered at office prior to driving on dikes or visiting "click" ponds. Leader: Rick Lucas **Call 772-567-3520 for information and reservations.**

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What 'Quality of Life' in Indian River County do we want?

What do you like about living in our community? We've often described it as living in paradise...but is it really? Are there actions we could undertake to make our community even better? Are you worried it won't be the same paradise in 10 years?

Riki Ott, Ph.D. a noted marine biologist, states that what people want can be classified into three big categories (with some examples in parentheses):

1. **Social Wealth** (safety, friendly neighbors, affordable health care)
2. **Economic Wealth** (affordable homes, financial security)
3. **Environmental Wealth** (clean air and water, lovely parks and natural habitats)

To ensure all of these are adequate, **we need to work together as a community** to make these things happen. Some of you are in land development, education and businesses that you want to thrive. Other folks are looking after our health, safety and service needs. Our community will flourish if we make sure our quality of life is high for all of us in all three areas. Yet the county continues to suffer from traffic congestion and sprawling development, a dying lagoon, depleted water sources, loss of natural green and agricultural space, a future of wildlife habitat fragmentation, water pollution and jobs scarcity, wasted human potential, economic stagnation, continued crime, and individual alienation.

Where do we start to work on improving our quality of life? We are proposing a new project to raise our community's awareness by identifying and measuring 'Quality of Life' indicators to serve as guideposts to indicate where the county is towards achieving the goal of a future that is environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable.

What will Quality of Life Indicators do? They will...

1. establish a baseline of values that will let us know where we are so we can determine whether our county is improving and making progress
2. identify what areas our county values the most
3. identify priorities to guide budgets, encourage business development, and seek funding
4. guide county and city officials in making decisions to build the community that we all want

Project activities include developing a rationale to define a community vision, setting goals and measuring progress. We believe citizens, community groups and governments often work at cross purposes without consensus on a vision, and without sustainable community goals and ways to measure progress towards those goals. We propose to take the initiative to establish an inclusive, community-based process to devise 'quality of life' indicators to guide the county to an environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable future. National Audubon has given us a very small grant of \$1,000 allowing us to begin the first phase – that is, to get the community behind this project and find supporters to help fund this effort (approximately \$60,000 needed).

By **getting diverse community stakeholders involved**, we hope to get the community behind this project using professional help where appropriate. So far we have asked the following agencies and institutions to be involved and work together on this project: Indian River and Sebastian Chambers of Commerce, Gifford Progressive Civic League, Cultural Council of Indian River County, Indian River Neighborhood Association, Tierra Verde Builder, Designers and Consultants, Indian River County Schools, Indian River State College, St. Johns River Water Management District, Florida Atlantic University, Indian River Ministerial Association, Marine Resources Council, Sexton Ranch, Mandala Development Group, and Treasure Coast Builders Association. Others are welcome to participate.

Projected time line:

1st Year 2009:

- Convene the partners as a working group representing all county interests to refine the category list and start to select likely indicators for our community's needs
- Convene six focus groups to discuss ideas for a community vision to refine the indicator list based on community values
- From these discussions refine the list of 'quality of life' indicators
- Construct a suitable community-wide 'quality of life' indicators questionnaire

2nd Year, 2010:

- Conduct a statistically valid, countywide telephone survey to determine indicator priorities, values, and preferences
- Based on the questionnaire, select ways to measure the 'quality of life' indicators
- Build support from the county commission, community leaders, and media to adopt a vision and agree on these indicators for future use
- Gather data conducted by professionals, high school, college faculty and students to establishing a baseline

3rd and Future years:

- Achieve support from the county commission, community leaders, and agencies based on the data indicators, to set priorities
- Encourage community actions to improve the quality of life by implementing projects, laws, and ordinances consistent with 'quality of life' indicators
- Re-measure progress towards achieving our goals by using the Quality of Life indicators on a regular bi-annual basis and make adjustments

We will need additional funding and professional involvement besides the small start-up grant from Audubon as well as volunteers to help and of course participants in this grand project. This brings us to my question to you...**Can you help?** What are you willing to do to bring about change to make our community really a paradise? If so let us know.
Richard Baker, President

Who is this?



Answer: American Kestrel

Perhaps the most colorful raptor in the world, this bird is the most common falcon in North America. Found all over the Americas, in towns as well as wild lands, this bird reaches a length of 9-12 inches with a wingspan of 20-24 inches. The larger female has rufous wings barred with black, and streaking on the chest, while the male has blue-gray wings and a lightly spotted chest and belly. Both sexes have dark feathers on the back of the head resembling eyes. This raptor watches for prey, mainly large insects, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and birds, from tall perches such as trees and telephone poles. Nests in cavities in trees, in buildings, and in nest boxes with no material added to nest hole. Cornell Lab lists its conservation status as increased greatly with historical deforestation of North America, with no significant trend across North America, but some local increases and decreases. *Species info from Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Photo by Bob Montanaro.*

About Your Pelican Island Audubon Membership

Your joining the National Audubon Society is laudable and much appreciated by Pelican Island Audubon Society (PIAS) and National Audubon. We have about 750 members in Indian River County, most of whom first joined National Audubon. National sends us your name and address so that we can send you news of our local chapter and its activities. We do not receive membership dues back from national, except the first-year dues of members whom we recruit. We do receive "base-line funding" from National Audubon, of \$725.28/year, but this does not even cover the cost of our sending you the *Peligram*.

National has provided some opportunities for our chapter to apply for grants for special projects. For example, we just received a small grant of \$1000 to begin our Quality of Life project. But none of our operating expenses are covered by your annual National Audubon dues. National Audubon has been supportive of our advocacy and environmental issues so we encourage your joining National as well as supporting your busy, local PIAS chapter.

Because our programs do require operating expenses, for the first time we are urging you to add PIAS membership dues. Together we can work for the benefit of our community. Your generosity in supporting PIAS above the minimal membership will be important to our role in Indian River County.

Membership Committee

Jens Tripson, Debby Ecker, Jean Catchpole

Outreach Center and Operating Fund donors for January

Richard Baker, Sharon Ballou, Susan Boyd, Virginia Bright, Leonard Brown, Charlotte Carle, Judy Elseroad, Leslie Greenwood, Nancy Irvin, Marjorie Konopaska, Alec Lui, Nick & Liz Melnick, Stuart Miner, Judith Nafziger, Richard Sakai, Sigurd Sandzen, Dennis Saver, W. Stewart, Mitchell & Tracy Waddell and William Winslow

Pelican Island Audubon Society 2009 Membership

Because each Audubon chapter is expected to support its operations without retention of members' dues -- which are sent to and retained by National Audubon -- **WE NEED YOUR FINANCIAL SUPPORT** for our many educational programs, field trips and environmental advocacy projects; for our handling of public questions; and the ten issues of our newsletter the *Peligram* we send to each member.

National Audubon membership

This includes subscriptions to *Audubon Magazine* and *The Florida Naturalist*.....

National \$20 _____

PIAS membership

Dues which PIAS will use for environmental education and advocacy and subscription to the *Peligram*.....

PIAS:
 Individual \$20 _____
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Please send your name and address along with a check payable to the "Pelican Island Audubon Society" to:

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Credit card payments call (772) 567-3520 Monday-Friday 9:00AM-1:00PM

Please email us if there is a local environmental issue which concerns you at piaudubon@bellsouth.net