

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. 5 May 2009

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

Florida Panther History and Management

The May 18 general meeting of the Pelican Island Audubon Society features Chris Belden of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service on the Florida Panther starting at 7:30 p.m. in the Vero Beach Community Center, 2266 14th Avenue.

As far as we know, when Europeans first came to this country, panthers roamed most all of North and South America. The Florida panther is the last of the species still surviving in the eastern United States. Natural genetic exchange with other panther populations ceased when the Florida panther became geographically isolated over a century ago due to persecution by early settlers bent on eradicating the panther by every means possible. Isolation, reduced population size, and inbreeding resulted in loss of genetic variability and diminished health. To address these problems, a genetic restoration program featured the release of eight Texas panthers into south Florida in 1995. Since the genetic restoration program began, there has been an almost 3-fold increase in the panther population, including increased genetic health and recolonization of areas in Big Cypress National Park and Everglades National Park.

Panthers are wide ranging, secretive, and occur at low densities requiring large contiguous areas to meet their social, reproductive, and energetic needs. Rapid development in south Florida has compromised the ability of landscapes to support a self-sustaining panther population. Panther habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation come with urbanization, residential development, conversion to agriculture, mining and mineral exploration, and lack of land use planning that incorporates panther conservation. Highways result in loss and fragmentation of habitat, lead to traffic related panther mortality, and encourage further human development, which increases the potential for panther-human interactions.

Chris Belden began the Florida panther project in 1976 and was involved with it until he retired at the end of December 2004 after 30 years with the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission. He was involved in one way or another in all phases of panther research, but his focus was on panther status and distribution and the feasibility of reintroducing additional panther populations. He was team leader of the USFWS' first Florida Panther Recovery Team from 1976-1981. In January 2005, Chris became the Florida Panther Recovery Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Light refreshments to be served following the program.



May 18
•
7:30 p.m.
•
Vero Beach
Community
Center

Florida Panther by Bob Montanaro.

Carson Banov awarded Audubon scholarship

Continuing Pelican Island Audubon's long tradition of supporting academic excellence in the community, once again the Society awarded a \$1,000 scholarship to a graduating senior at Vero Beach High School to continue in higher education. The scholarship awarded goes to the best entry answering the essay question, "Preservation of the Earth's environment is one of our greatest challenges. Explain how you can or will help meet the challenge to preserve Earth's environment." The 2009 scholarship went to Carson Banov who will be studying mechanical engineering at Georgia Tech. Mr. Banov's essay concludes by saying, "Living in Vero Beach, I have seen some of the natural beauty of our country. Furthermore, I have seen many of our natural resources harmed through insensitivity. I have seen beaches ruined by pollution and nature destroyed for the sake of new home construction. I firmly believe that as an engineer I can make an impact by pushing for new, environmentally friendly technology and implement the change necessary to convert our current knowledge into solutions to solve the global problem of protecting the environment."



Richard Baker, Carson Banov, and Susan Boyd at Vero Beach High School Scholarship Award Night, April 28, 2009

Photo by Bob Montanaro.

Special thanks go to Ruth Moore, whose generous financial support helps fund the Society's scholarship program. Thank you also to scholarship chair Susan Boyd and essay judges Jens & Melissa Tripson, Nancy Irvin, Peter Sutherland, Sean Fromang, and Darlene Halliday.

We never know the worth of water till the well is dry. ~Thomas Fuller, 1732

CALL FOR ENTRIES

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Details: www.audubonmagazinephotoawards.org

Smithsonian Marine Station at Ft. Pierce Guided Tour – May 21, 2009 - 2-3pm

Come hear about current research from the scientists themselves! This approximately one hour program provides an introduction to the Smithsonian's work in Florida, a tour of our state-of-the-art facilities and opportunities to speak with our marine scientists. Advance registration is required as space is limited. The tour is free. Interested individuals can schedule directly with Laura Diederick, Education Specialist, at 772-465-3271. Come early and visit the Smithsonian Marine Ecosystems Exhibit for a small admission fee: \$3 per adult or \$2 per senior.

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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

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The President's Hoot **Where have all the birds gone?**

This is a query people have been calling and writing into the Audubon office.

A few days ago, I met Todd McGrain, Associate Professor, at Cornell University, who started The Lost Bird Project, which recognizes and immortalizes five North American birds (the passenger pigeon, Carolina parakeet, Labrador duck, great auk, and heath hen, the later a close relative of the prairie chicken) that have been driven to extinction by us, modern humans. He is doing this by creating beautiful bronze sculptures of each species to remind us of the finality of our loss of these birds and to not forget them. But our duty is to prevent further human caused extinction of additional species. The sculptures will be placed near where the last bird of the five species was last seen. Examples of the sculptures can be found on McGrain's website <http://www.toddmcgrain.com/>

Interestingly, one of the proven last sightings of the Carolina parakeet might have been in Indian River County on March 1889 as Frank Chapman, an ornithologist, shot 15 specimens of about 50 birds on the St. Sebastian River. In fact, it might have been at the newly named "Cypress Bend Community Preserve", a recently purchased conservation land on the St. Sebastian River. As described by Chapman, "The Sebastian is a beautiful river; no words of mine can adequately describe it. Half a mile wide at its mouth, it narrows rapidly, and three miles above appears as a mere stream which at our camp, eight miles up, was not more than fifty feet in width and about fifteen in depth. Its course is exceedingly irregular and winding; the banks as we found them are high and for some distance from the water densely grown with palms and cypresses which, arching, meet over head, forming most enchanting vistas, and in many places there was a wild profusion of blooming *Convolvulus* (morning glory) and moon-flower" (Austin, E. S. 1967. Frank M. Chapman in Florida: His journals and letters. University of Florida Press, Gainesville). Except for the loss of many cypress trees, this is a good description of this river site today.

Unfortunately, humans probably were the main reason for their decline. Some were shot for food and pleasure, others collected for caged pets, and over 800 specimens gather dust today in museums around the world. Little information is known about the life and behavior of this species. The last known individual died in the Cincinnati Zoo in 1918 (Barrow, M. V., Jr. 1998. A passion for birds: American ornithology after Audubon. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.)

We do know that the Carolina Parakeet was a very social species living together in flocks. If one was injured by a hunter, the other birds would flock around it until all were killed. This "devotion" behavior to each other was probably why they rapidly were shot in big numbers.

In last month's Peligram, Dr. Graham Cox reviewed how so many of our common birds are not so common any more. The 2007 Wakeup Call Report based on combing through 40 years of data found that since 1967, the average population of the common birds in steepest decline have fallen 70 percent. The top 10 in this decline include the northern bobwhite, northern pintail, eastern meadowlark, loggerhead shrike, field sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, common tern, greater scaup but also cardinals, red-headed woodpeckers, brown thrashers, all found in Florida although some rare.

Birds will go where there is food to be found. Although not a scientific study, many phone calls to our PIAS office indicate that there are less birds around in our members' yards, including a former PIAS President who noticed fewer nesting in his nearby woods this year saying. "I have fed and watered for 20 years or more. The birds that have totally disappeared numbering in the hundreds are cardinals mockingbirds, blue jays, catbirds, mourning doves, brown thrashers.... Believe it or not, I'm not even seeing any starlings, grackles, or crows, either."

Besides habitat loss, other possibilities of the recent change in bird populations is due to climate change. Nearly 60% of the 305 bird species found in North America in winter are shifting their ranges northward by an average of 35 miles. Extreme examples are the ring-billed gull, common here, has moved 355 miles further north, Wild Turkey 407 miles, purple finch 433 miles. Even the Spruce Grouse, found in Canada, Alaska, and the northern edge of the contiguous United States moved 316 miles north. These birds are telling us that there is a traumatic climate change occurring!

While back in the late 1800s and early 1900s ornithologists thought collecting specimens was the right thing to do, the Audubon movement today is to protect birds, other animals, and conservation lands. As a reminder to the past and to honor a human caused extinction, I hope that one of the Carolina parakeet sculptures is placed in Indian River County. The citizens of our county have done a great job in conserving our wet- and uplands. Our chapter has played a large role in getting the voters of Indian River County to pass referendums in the amount of 76 million dollars in bond money to purchase and preserve our heritage. We need to continue this leadership!

Richard Baker, President

Who is this?

This common insect lives in colonies of 20,000 to 80,000 individuals. Raised for honey and beeswax, they are essential for pollination of crops. According to Texas A&M University's Dept. of Entomology, it takes nectar collected from about two million flowers to make one pound of honey. A single individual of this insect makes about 1/12th of a teaspoon of honey in its lifetime.



Honey Bee
Answer:

Photo by Bob Montanaro from Treasure Hammock Ranch (www.floridacattleranch.org).

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*	\$20 _____
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Individual	\$20 _____
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*National Audubon membership

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

**Pelican Island Audubon membership

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

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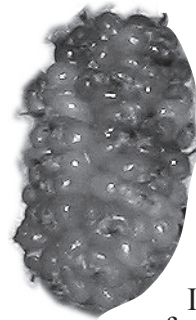
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Please email us if there is a local environmental issue which concerns you at piaudubon@bellsouth.net

Plant of the Month

by Janice Broda

You will need to battle the birds to get your share of the succulent, sweet fruits of the red mulberry (*Morus rubra*) tree. As soon as the fruits ripen to dark red purple in the spring -- and sometimes before



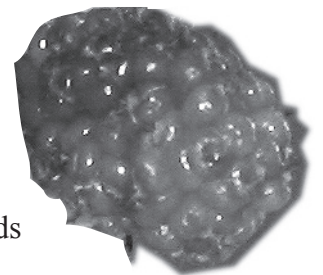
they have fully ripened -- birds and small mammals, including raccoons, squirrels, and opossums, devour the fruits. Humans eat the fruits fresh, in jellies and jams, strudels and pies, and use them to make wine.

This deciduous tree that grows up to sixty feet tall is found throughout the eastern United States where soils are somewhat moist but not soggy.

In Florida, red mulberry frequently is found along the edges of marshes where it reportedly was planted by aboriginal peoples. Its attractive bark is greyish in color and peels in distinctive vertical strips.

The alternate leaves of red mulberry are highly variable in shape and rough to the touch. Leaves on immature trees frequently are lobed, and most adult leaves are entire with a pointed tip. The edges of the leaves are serrated.

Red mulberry thrives in the well-drained soils found in most yards. Plant this tree in your landscape to feed the birds and yourself.



Red Mulberry

Photos by Janice Broda.

May & June Field Trips with Rick Lucas

May 9, 2009—Forster's Preserve in Wabasso. Meet in Forster's parking lot at 7am. Directions: US 1 to CR 510, East to Jungle Trail, South to Forster's Preserve.

June 6, 2009—Viera Wetlands in Viera. 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, West to end. All vehicles must be registered at office prior to driving on dikes or visiting "click" ponds.

Please call 772-567-3520 for reservations & information.