



# Tropical Audubon Bulletin

The Voice of Conservation in South Florida...



5530 Sunset Drive; Miami, Florida 33143

(305) 667-7337

May/June 2008

## Virginia Key Birding: Reminiscence and Excitement

by Robin Diaz

**G**ary Milano of DERM envisioned a restoration project on Virginia Key seven years ago and started the wheels of funding and permitting. When a reasonable bid pulled everything together, he plunged ahead with the project, albeit quietly, in September 2007. He calls it a "true restoration" with the restored zones incorporated into a city master plan for Virginia Key. The lower-than-expected bid enabled Gary to expand the project from 50 acres to 65 acres, plus hardwood hammock reconstruction. The abandoned area was so dense with exotic invasive vegetation that the work crews never knew what to expect. They had to work through years of neglected and abandoned habitat with its accumulated trash. Several stands of 80-year-old Red Mangroves were a great surprise.

The project, Virginia Key Ecosystem Restoration Area, incorporates 3 large systems (wetlands, tropical

hardwood hammock and dune/coastal strand), as well as several isolated freshwater ponds and hand-planted marsh areas. When a shallow saltwater channel is opened in the near future, the marshes will become brackish and the Spartina grass and Black Needle Rush will host wintering birds. The project is within the new Virginia Key Beach Park, open sunrise to sunset with no entrance fee. Turtle lights in the parking area are an important feature, since nesting Loggerhead Turtles use the nearby beach.

It's my good fortune to be a part of the monitoring team for this restoration project. I record bird and other wildlife sightings, as well as observe changes in the habitats. So far, the bird list is quite impressive with a few surprises. Some of the interesting birds seen during the past four weeks are: Least Bitterns, Roseate Spoonbills, 3 falcon species, Sora, Black-necked Stilts and nesting Common Ground-Doves. Egyptian

Geese frequent the area and the Great Black-Hawk routinely makes its presence known. Other interesting critters are also present: Florida Red-bellied Cooters, Iguanas, Tarpon in the large pond, a leucistic raccoon and an American Saltwater Crocodile.

South Florida birders fondly reminisce about the fabulous Virginia Key mud flats and sightings of a black-hawk, whose provenance remains a mystery. Virginia Key in the 1970's and 80's was *the* place to bird during migration. These birders will find the restored areas just as interesting – perhaps even more diverse – as the "good old days." Birders newer to the hobby will find the boardwalk and restored habitats exciting and refreshing spots to bird. The best aspect of this new birding hotspot is that you never know what will turn up!



## NORTH AMERICAN MIGRATION COUNT

**T**he North American Migration Count (NAMC), sponsored in Florida by the Florida Ornithological Society, with the assistance of local Audubon chapters, bird clubs and other interested organizations, is a semi-annual snapshot of the progress and shape of bird migration. On Saturday, May 10, birders from around the country will be collecting information on the abundance and distribution of both migrant and resident birds. If you can find and identify birds and would like to participate in the count in either Miami-Dade or Monroe County, contact us at fieldtrips@tropicalaudubon.org. We'll send you NAMC instructions and a checklist. We'll also let you know which areas need coverage (or, you can let us know which area you wish to cover; it could be your own backyard, neighborhood, a local park or other natural area). It is important that there is no overlap or duplication of coverage areas, so please contact us before May 12.

## Native Plant Sale

at the Doc Thomas House

Sat-Sun. June 7-8

**Our native plant sales are famous and fun. We have a great selection of South Florida plants with knowledgeable sales people to help you choose the best ones for your yard.**

***Come early for the best selection, stay late to enjoy the company!***

The **Bananaquit** is a common to abundant bird throughout its range, which includes the West Indies (except Cuba), Central America and much of South America. I saw hundreds during my recent visit to Trinidad and Tobago. Though they breed in locations as close as the Bahamas, they are rarely found in Florida. The mid-February discovery of a Bananaquit in an upscale Ft. Lauderdale neighborhood was thus major news not only in south Florida but throughout the North American birding community. Found by an out-of-state birder, this colorful little bird delighted hundreds of local and visiting birders during its three-week stay. In mid-March, birders visiting the Dry Tortugas found and photographed another West Indian specialty, a Loggerhead Kingbird. This is only the second verified North American record for this species, the first being just last spring. This bird remained on Garden Key in the Tortugas through the end of the month.

South Florida has always been one of the better places in North America to see a variety of wintering warblers, with close to twenty species possible in and around Everglades National Park. A couple of warbler species were found during the local Christmas Bird Counts that, while unusual for Florida in winter, are now becoming regular for our CBCs. A Prothonotary Warbler was again found during the Coot Bay/Everglades National Park CBC. A Nashville Warbler was seen once again dur-

ing the Kendall CBC, this time on the campus of the University of Miami. A Hooded Warbler was spotted along Hidden Lake Road during the Long Pine Key CBC, and remained for much of the season. Other not-to-be-expected CBC finds included Long-billed Curlew and Short-eared Owl, both seen during the Coot Bay CBC, and Horned Grebe on the Miami CBC. The Hialeah-area flock of Bronzed Cowbirds was found again this year during the Miami CBC. A Brown-crested Flycatcher was seen on Hidden Lake Road during the Long Pine Key CBC; a second bird was later discovered there, and both remained at that location for several months.

A surprising number of species from the western United States were found in Florida this winter. Many were seen during Tropical Audubon's annual trip to North Florida in January, including a Say's Phoebe near Lake Apopka and Broad-tailed, Anna's and Rufous Hummingbirds, Western Tanager, Fox Sparrow and Bullock's Oriole in the Panhandle. Several Horned Larks again wintered in Jackson County in the Panhandle, but could not be found by the TAS group.

Elsewhere, a Groove-billed Ani was found at Myakka River State Park in Sarasota County during January. In February, Lazuli Buntings were present in both Lee and Lake Counties. A Cassin's Kingbird spent much of the winter near Stormwater Treatment Area 5 in Hendry County. The hundreds of birders who flocked to STA-5 in February were also treated to close-up looks of a Greater Flamingo. During March, a visiting birder reported a Golden-cheeked Warbler at Six-Mile Cypress Slough Preserve in Lee County, but the bird could not be relocated and was possibly misidentified. Closer to home, a possible Hammond's Flycatcher was reported in December at Long Key Natural Area in Broward County, but that bird was also never confirmed. In Miami-Dade, a Yellow-headed Blackbird was found at Dump Marsh in December and a Western Tanager was at Bill Baggs Cape

Florida State Park during January. A Dickcissel, along with Shiny and Bronzed Cowbirds, were regularly visiting a Homestead feeder throughout the season.

Several rare-for-Florida gulls appeared in the state during the winter months, especially at landfills in the Daytona and Cocoa Beach areas. California, Glaucous, Iceland and Thayer's Gulls were recorded from both locations during the season. In January, an Iceland Gull was seen north of Jacksonville. A Glaucous Gull was found in Key West during February. A Great Cormorant was discovered for the second consecutive winter at John U. Lloyd State Park in Broward County; another wintered at Ponce Inlet in Volusia County. Both Razorbill and Dovekie were reported from Ponce Inlet during January; also seen there this winter were Purple Sandpiper and Brant. In early March, two Brant were spotted by visiting birders near the Card Sound Bridge in Key Largo; possibly the same two birds were later seen on Key Biscayne. Other unusual waterfowl found in the state this winter included Ross's Geese in Jackson and Manatee Counties, a White-winged Scoter seen off Black Point in early March and a Snow Goose, first reported from Cutler Wetlands this fall, which reappeared at that location in mid-March.

Finally, all is apparently not yet lost for the family of Smooth-billed Anis that resides in the area south of Ft. Lauderdale International Airport. For the past couple of years, anis could be consistently found in weedy fields near a warehouse on Old Griffin Road. In January, one of those fields was bulldozed, and the anis seemed to disappear. In late March, they were rediscovered in an unplowed field at this same location, and are now being reported regularly again. How long they can hold on there is anyone's guess. This species, while still common throughout its range in the Caribbean and Central and South America, has mysteriously disappeared from just about all of its former range in Florida, and sadly may be on the brink of extirpation from the state.

Tropical Audubon Society (TAS) is a group of dedicated citizens who care about the quality of South Florida's environment. Established in 1947, we are a chapter of National Audubon Society and Florida Audubon Society. Our headquarters, the Doc Thomas House, is a Dade County Historic site on three sub-tropical acres of native habitat in South Miami.

Tropical Audubon's purposes are:

- 1) Conservation: to work toward protection of the natural world and to promote wise stewardship of natural resources, especially native plants and animals and their habitat.
- 2) Education: to promote, among members and the public of all ages, an understanding and appreciation of nature, the

environment, and ecological relationships.

- 3) Enjoyment: as a society of members with compatible interests, to enjoy together the study and protection of nature. We believe in the wisdom of nature's design. We seek to foster and promote ecological conscientiousness in our community.

Editor: Jen Lindsley

Desk Top Publishing: Steven Mumford

Tropical Audubon Bulletin, the official newsletter of the Tropical Audubon Society, is published bimonthly by the Tropical Audubon Society, a non-profit, 501(c) (3) tax-exempt organization. Throughout this newsletter, "TAS" refers to the Tropical Audubon Society, while "DTH" refers to the Doc

Thomas House, the site of our office located at 5530 Sunset Drive; Miami, Florida 33143. The phone number is (305) 667-7337. Membership rate, \$20 per year. Please make your checks payable to Tropical Audubon Society, and mail to our office (address above). Articles, news of events, original drawings, and letters to the Editor are welcomed, and should be submitted to the TAS office 4 weeks prior to each bi-monthly publication. It would be preferable if your copy were submitted via the internet. See the "About TAS" section of our website for more information.

Visit Tropical Audubon on the internet at:

[tropicalaudubon.org](http://tropicalaudubon.org)



# Tropical Audubon Society Member's Questionnaire

*In order to better serve the needs of our community, your TAS Board of Directors needs your help. Please take just a few minutes to complete this questionnaire about the goals, activities and program topics that you would like us to consider for next year. Please clip, fold and return it to us at TAS by the end of the summer. We thank Audubon of Martin County for this questionnaire.*

**Why did you join Audubon?** (Check all that apply)

- To get Audubon Magazine
- To promote conservation
- To attend field trips
- To learn more about birds
- To meet people with similar interests
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**What type of meeting topics do you find the most interesting?**

- Birding
- Conservation issues
- Habitat preservation or restoration
- Natural history and wildlife
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Please check the conservation issues that you believe should be priorities for us:**

- Protection of birds
- Protection of Biscayne Bay
- Protection of wetlands
- Energy conservation
- Land acquisition and habitat protection
- Recycling/solid waste management
- Protection of endangered species
- Environmental education
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Check if you have ever contacted a governmental official or agency about a conservation issue as a result of:**

- A monthly program meeting
- An article in our newsletter
- Public media
- Another conservation group
- Information from our website

**I would attend the Birding 101 course if it focused on:**

- Birding by ear
- Plumage variations
- Backyard birds
- One family group
- Local birds by month
- Habitat & its birds
- Migration influences
- Field work
- Rarities
- Right place wrong bird

If it were held on: Weekday \_\_\_\_\_ Days \_\_\_\_\_ Nights \_\_\_\_\_  
Weekend \_\_\_\_\_ Days \_\_\_\_\_

**What field trip or workshop would you attend if it focused on:**

- Wildlife photography
- Creating backyard wildlife habitats
- Citizen's role in local decision-making
- Identifying plants and animals
- Habitat restoration work
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**What types of field trips are you most interested in attending?**

- Weekend trips
- Weekday trips
- Canoe/kayak trips
- Boat trips
- Birding
- Hiking
- Plant ID
- Local trips
- Distant locations
- Wilderness areas
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**In which of the following would you be interested in participating?**

- Assisting at the Tropical Audubon Office
- Assisting with fund-raising
- Assisting with grant writing/administration
- Assisting at community events & outreach
- Assisting with program meetings
- Assisting the conservation committee
- Assisting the education committee
- Assisting with public relations
- Assisting the treasurer
- Assisting with field trips
- Assisting with hospitality
- Bird-a-thon
- Christmas Bird Count
- Conducting or organizing bird surveys
- Contacting elected officials
- Helping with a "telephone tree"
- Management of TAS library & properties
- Organizing letter-writing campaigns
- Representing Tropical Audubon at community mtgs
- Serving on the Board of Directors
- Writing an article for the newsletter
- Becoming a docent to give tours at DTH
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Yes I would like to get field trip reminders, volunteer advisories and updates electronically.  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Yes I would prefer to get my newsletter off the website. (Don't send me a newsletter)  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ ST \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Yes No Tropical Audubon should develop and publish a Handbook for members?

Yes No I think that the chapter newsletter, the TAS Bulletin, is an effective communication tool for the membership. Please list any suggestions for improvement of the TAS Bulletin.

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Please list your suggestions for future program meetings, topics, field trip destinations or any other suggestions.

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**Affix  
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Tropical Audubon Society  
5530 Sunset Drive  
Miami, FL 33143

## Kern Brothers Creating Private Sanctuary in Costa Rica

**J**im Kern, a former board member of Tropical Audubon and the founder of the Florida Trail, and his brother Rich, a former film lecturer for the National Audubon Society, are assembling partners to buy 490 acres of virgin cloud forest in the Savegre Valley of Costa Rica.

On Wednesday, April 9 Rich Kern presented his film *Empires of the Sun* at the Tropical Audubon meeting. Rich explained that while making the film he and his wife Judy learned about a population of quetzals in the high mountains along the path of the Savegre Valley, about 50 miles SE of San Jose. On a later trip Jim Kern learned about the available tract. The property adjoins the new Los Quetzales National



This house (under construction nearby) is within the investors' budget

Park and is also close to two popular eco lodges that cater to bird watchers: The Savegre Mountain Hotel and the Trogon Lodge.

Jim Kern first tried the concept of preserving wilderness land through private ownership in the early 70's when he, his brother Rich and a dozen of their friends bought 300 acres along Florida's Fisheating Creek. The owners bound themselves to a set of rules that would keep the land undeveloped for future generations. Today the property is still pristine and enjoyed by its owners.



Entrance to the property

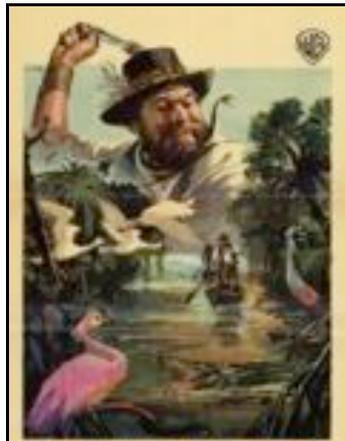
For more information, contact...

**[jakern@aug.com](mailto:jakern@aug.com)**

### You're Invited to a Movie Extravaganza! *Wind Across The Everglades*

The Institute for Regional Conservation (IRC) and Tropical Audubon Society (TAS) join forces to bring you *Wind Across the Everglades*. This 1958 classic movie, never released on DVD or video in the U.S., stars Burl Ives, Christopher Plummer and Gypsy Rose Lee. Get a glimpse of Miami in its pioneer days as you're transported to a conservation battlefield where the Audubon Society takes on the Cottonmouth Gang to protect wading birds from plume hunters. The battle gets nasty as elements of the Everglades become weapons... beware death by manchineel!

**When:** Thursday, May 8; 7:00pm  
**Where:** Doc Thomas House  
5530 Sunset Drive  
**Tickets:** \$20 at the door



### *What Our Friends Are Doing*

#### Florida Native Plant Society

The Dade Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society meets at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, 10901 Old Cutler Road (South entrance) at 7:30. Meetings are free and open to the public and include refreshments starting at 7:15, plant raffle and discussion of the raffle plants (lots of neat, hard-to-get stuff!). For more information see <http://dade.fnpschapters.org> or call 305-255-6404.

**May 27 program:** "Man-o-War, Manatee & Mormon Key: Places Names in South Florida's National Parks" by Larry Perez of the National Park Service. June 24 program: "South Florida Native Plant Horticulture" by Jeff Wasielewski, Horticultural Consultant and Arborist.

## What A **WINGDING** We Had!

On Sunday, April 27, Tropical hosted a large and enthusiastic group of members and friends for our annual membership meeting, now called the Wingding! This year, we welcomed Paul Souza of the US Fish and



Cynthia Guerra & Richard Grosso

Wildlife Service who spoke on restoring our Everglades, our common history and our vision for the future. Mr. Souza spoke eloquently about the role that groups like TAS play, and we were delighted to have him come share this special day with us.

After the keynote address, TAS was proud to honor Richard Grosso, general counsel of the Everglades Law Center, as recipient of the TAS Polly Redford Citizen Service Award; Emilie Young, retired director of the Miami-Dade County's Environmentally Endangered Lands Program, as recipient of the TAS Dan Beard Government Service Award; and Brother Milledge, new TAS Board Member and extraordinary volunteer, as recipient of the TAS Board Appreciation Award. The awardees collectively have invested decades of work toward pro-

tecting the environment in South Florida.

The event concluded with recognition of our Birdathon teams and a fabulous silent auction. Many TAS members and supporters helped to bring the event together and we are grateful to them all. Thanks to one and all for making this event a great success! We hope you make plans to join us next year...

TAS NOTES TAS

### TAS Workdays at the Doc Thomas House

Want to learn about native plants, help Tropical maintain our native landscape at the Doc Thomas House and get your hands dirty? We need you!

#### When:

Thursday Evenings; and  
Saturday's during the Summer on  
May 17th, June 21st, July 19th & Aug 16th

#### More Specifically:

Thursdays from 4:30-8pm and  
Saturdays 8:00-12:30pm

**What:** Pineland Planting and Restoration

This is a great opportunity for students to earn community service hours and for families and friends to work for a **GREEN** cause together.

Water and tools provided, please bring clothes that can get dirty, closed-toe shoes, sunscreen, hat and gloves.

For more information:

E-mail [volunteer@tropicalaudubon.org](mailto:volunteer@tropicalaudubon.org)  
Check our website: [www.tropicalaudubon.org](http://www.tropicalaudubon.org)  
or call 305-667-7337.

## Thanks to our Donors!

The following generous individuals and organizations have contributed to TAS since the last Bulletin..

As always, we appreciate your support!

#### Purple Gallinule (\$250 to \$499)

Paul Gore, Richard Townsend

#### Painted Bunting (\$100 to \$249)

Pablo Marques, anonymous

#### White Crowned Pigeon

(\$50 to \$99)

Paddy Cunningham

### Please Support TAS

TAS may be a small non-profit organization, but we accomplish so much more than our little budget would suggest that we can. We rely on our Board of Directors, and you – our members – to support the work we do. Please take this opportunity to send your tax-deductible contribution to TAS at 5530 Sunset Drive, Miami, FL, 33143. Every dollar you send to us stays with TAS to support our important conservation work in Miami-Dade County. As always, we appreciate your generosity!

### General Meetings

**Wed. May 14, 7:30pm** – Skip Snow and Larry Perez will come from Everglades National Park to discuss the parks' problems with exotics and the plan to deal with them in the future. Food will be provided. This is the last Member Meeting until September 2008!

Tropical Audubon Society  
5530 Sunset Drive  
Miami, FL 33143

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