South Florida is home to a diverse network of unique and protected habitats, among them the Biscayne Bay Aquatic Preserves. While hundreds of thousands of locals and tourists alike experience the Aquatic Preserves each year (including TAS members), traversing its waters by boat or kayak and birding and biking along its shorelines, many of us are unaware that all of Biscayne Bay that is north and south of Biscayne National park receives the highest level of environmental protection from the state of Florida. The protection afforded Biscayne Bay by designating two state aquatic preserves was made possible only because of the hard work of engaged environmentalists (people like you) and like-minded lawmakers, beginning in the 1960s, when the first aquatic preserve was established in Estero Bay, and continuing into the 1970s, when the Biscayne Bay aquatic preserves were created. Biscayne Bay’s two aquatic preserves, established in 1974 and 1975 respectively, are the Biscayne Bay Aquatic Preserve and the Biscayne Bay – Cape Florida to Monroe County Line Aquatic Preserve. Do not confuse them with Biscayne National Park. The national park, which was established in 1980 and encompasses the middle to the south end of Biscayne Bay, is a federal entity. In contrast, the aquatic preserves are managed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and together the two preserves comprise almost 70,000 acres that run from Hallandale in Broward County (where the headwaters of Oleta River begin) all the way down to Little Card Sound in Key Largo. A staff of two (and some dedicated volunteers) are responsible for executing the mission of Florida’s aquatic preserve program: “Protect and maintain the natural condition of aquatic preserves so that their aesthetic, biological, and scientific values may endure for the enjoyment of future generations.” The role of citizen action in the program’s creation is acknowledged in the draft Biscayne Bay Aquatic Preserves Management Plan: “The laws supporting Florida’s aquatic preserve management are the direct result of the public’s awareness of and interest in protecting Florida’s aquatic environment.”

Plummeting Brown Pelican Populations

“OH, a wondrous bird is the pelican! His bill holds more than his belican ... ” So wrote Dixon Merritt about 100 years ago in the opening lines of his famous limerick about the Brown Pelican. It is uncertain whether Merritt, a newspaper editor in Lebanon, Tennessee, ever actually saw pelicans in the wild, yet his fascination with them illustrates the engaging bird’s popular appeal. The pelican has become symbolic of our southern coasts. We often see them depicted on postcards and in advertisements for Florida tourism — flying low in a beautiful string of birds, gliding just above the waves, or comically perched on fishing docks, begging for handouts. As well as being a symbol of our beaches and estuaries, the pelican is also a well-established indicator of the health of these same ecosystems. Everyone remembers the story of the crash in pelican populations during the 1950s and
Dear Friends,

Some have asked how, day in and day out, TAS can keep fighting the David vs. Goliath fights, in which of course we are always David. It does get exhausting, knowing that our side has fewer resources, but we are always on the side of what is best for the planet, and that makes it easy. Lately TAS has found that we are the lone voice for many issues. If we do not speak up, frequently nobody will. We must keep our voice strong. The single most important thing you can do is get inspired: to help, to give and to get involved. If you need inspiration, I recommend the movie “The Lorax”...

I was in sixth grade when I was inspired by this Dr. Seuss book; I liked it so much, my classmates nicknamed me “The Lorax,” and it stuck — all these years later, some still call me the Lorax. In the book, the Lorax speaks for the Truffula trees and the wildlife that has no voice. He also faces a David and Goliath scenario, where he fights the corporation that makes “Thneeds” out of trees. Recently, I was reminded of the power of this message by the story of a fourth-grade class who took action when they noticed that the Universal Studios website promoting the movie had no environmental message. In fact, the only message was how to buy things — the antithesis of the Lorax message. The class started a “Lorax Petition Project,” with a petition on the Change.org website that drew more than 50,000 signatures. Their teacher, Ted Wells, recently reported, “Universal Studios changed ‘The Lorax’ webpage almost exactly as my class requested! They even used the Truffula tree image for a button and linked the Green Tips Random House page, just like my students suggested in this petition.”

We still live in a country where if you use your voice and organize behind an issue, change does happen. So don’t wait for Earth Day to do something...get involved now! Pick something you care about and work on it!

If time is an issue, send a check with a letter that tells us what is important to you. If you have time, just come and get involved. A good place to start is by joining us for our monthly conservation meetings. We can help focus your talents; you will become part of something much larger, and you will most definitely learn something new. This year at TAS we find ourselves blessed with many interns and volunteers, and there is no shortage of inspiring projects and work being done. To name a few:

**Stephanie Cornejo** is our outreach and education coordinator. She heads up the Together Green partnership with Toyota to restore TAS properties and teach about the importance of restoration, defragmentation, and enhancement of stopover habitats to feed wildlife in urban areas, including our own backyards.

**Lauren McGurk**, our law intern, speaks on our behalf at public meetings and is a liaison to the SFWMD. She spearheads an effort to highlight the issues that face Biscayne Bay; we are about to release a white paper that we hope will help build our Biscayne Bay Coalition.

**Susan Shapiro**, an intern focused on state issues and the legislature, set up meetings with the entire Miami-Dade County Legislative Delegation and coordinated efforts to defeat section 5 of House Bill 503. She continues to work to restore money to Everglades and submerged lands protections.

**Celeste De Palma**, an intern who focuses on outreach in Spanish, works on growth management issues and has been reaching out to the residents and businesses surrounding our Porter-Russell Pineland Preserve.

**Judy Del Rio** is leading a video project to capture every aspect of what we do at TAS. She is also using video as an interpretative tool in our Nature Center Project; soon you will be able to walk onto the grounds and scan one of many images with your smart phone to watch a video clip.

So it is easy to be inspired to continue the fight. We hope that someday it will be even easier, when our citizens are better educated and our elected leaders understand how important the environment is to our survival. It is possible to live with a smaller footprint and still enjoy all the resources this planet has to offer.

My message for everyone is get involved, whether it’s by volunteering or by helping financially. TAS needs all hands on deck this year so that we can be a more effective voice for conservation. Or just bring environmental issues into the conversation, no matter where you are or what you do. Make sure all your friends and relatives are in the know!

See you soon!

Laura Reynolds, aka “The Lorax”
**THE FLORIDA SHOREBIRD DATABASE**

**A NEW TOOL FOR SOUTH FLORIDA BIRDERS**

by Linda Ellis

It’s time for South Florida to get involved with the Florida Shorebird Database (FSD), an exciting new tool for the conservation of shorebirds and seabirds. The new and improved monitoring database, created by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) and its partners, went online last May and replaces the Florida Beach-Nesting Birds database. While anyone can view and enter data on the informative website, FSD’s primary users are the partnerships — made up of citizens, biologists, land managers, organizations, businesses and government agencies — of the Florida Shorebird Alliance (the word “shorebird” is used generically to include all shorebirds and seabirds). The FSA was created in 2009 to link already-existing partnerships; its purpose, according to the website, is to share ideas, coordinate efforts and ensure consistency in monitoring and management on a statewide scale.

There are currently eight such partnerships in Florida but, unfortunately, none in South Florida or the Keys. Julie Wraithmell, director of wildlife conservation for the Florida Audubon Society, hopes that will soon change. “South Florida is too often ‘written off’ as lost to beach-dependent birds, simply because of the extent of development and disturbance of its coastline,” she said. “Nevertheless, it’s important to cover this part of the state.” First, because it is as important to monitor the absence of birds as it is to monitor their presence, she explained. Second, because rooftop nesting is increasingly important for Least Terns, Roseate Terns and Skimmers. “Volunteers can make a huge difference in the success of rooftop colonies, with outreach to building owners and helping return fallen chicks to their roofs,” she said. Third, South Florida supports substantial numbers of wintering and passage shorebirds and seabirds, two groups for which Audubon has been hard at work, Wraithmell said. “Getting accurate surveys of these species and advocating for protections for essential wintering and stopover habitat are both important focuses for this region.”

While the new database currently supports only the monitoring of beach-nesting birds, a second part that monitors wintering shorebirds and seabirds is being developed and will likely be operational by next winter.

**Nesting data**

The FWC uses FSD beach-nesting data to make real-time decisions about where and how to focus conservation efforts. The data, entered by volunteers, includes not only the locations and numbers of nests, but also numbers of chicks and fledglings, the presence of predator tracks, the amount of wrack on the beach, and how frequently the birds are flushed off their nests by dogs or people. The protocol for entering data is “rather complicated,” FWC biologist Nancy Douglass said in a presentation at the Audubon Assembly in October, but she encouraged birders to visit the website and start participating. “It will really use your citizen science muscle,” she added.

In South Florida, beach nesting is rare because of tourism and development. “What we’re lacking here is monitoring of rooftop nesting,” said Ricardo Zambrano, a regional biologist with FWC in West Palm Beach. In 2010, a FWC survey of nesting bird colonies on roofs located...
Birders in South Florida will remember the fall migration of 2011, not only for the impressive variety of rarities they saw during the season but also for the spectacular fallout that occurred in mid-October. A stalled weather system in the Keys brought southbound migration to a standstill; for the next few days, grounded songbirds were everywhere, especially at migrant traps like Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park on Key Biscayne. Birders willing to tolerate passing rain showers were treated to an amazing assemblage of migrant cuckoos, flycatchers, vireos, thrushes, warblers, tanagers, buntings and grosbeaks. Bay-breasted Warblers, not often seen in great numbers in Florida, were especially abundant, as were Yellow-billed Cuckoos. Later in the week, a Bananaquit was sighted near Cape Florida’s lighthouse. Capping the memorable week was the discovery of a Kirtland’s Warbler at Richardson Historic Park in Broward County and a Masked Duck at the Key West Botanical Garden in Monroe County. The following week, a Cuban Bullfinch was spotted in a South Miami backyard, where it remained for several weeks; provenance unknown.

Ten species of vireos are listed on the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission’s checklist of Florida’s birds; all ten were found in South Florida this past fall. The most unexpected was a Yellow-green Vireo that was discovered during early October at Greyballs Hammock Park in Miami-Dade County. A Thick-billed Vireo was seen at the park in early August; another was photographed at Greyballs Park in late October. A Warbling Vireo was seen at Arch Creek Park in early September, while Bell’s and Philadelphia Vireos were documented at a number of locations. Several rare flycatchers were tallied during the season, including a Fork-tailed Flycatcher that was discovered by a fifth-grade teacher and her class while visiting Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge in Palm Beach County. A Cassin’s Kingbird returned for the fourth consecutive year to Stormwater Treatment Area 5 in Hendry County. The agricultural area just outside the main entrance to Everglades National Park was especially productive for vagrant flycatchers. A Tropical/Couch’s Kingbird was also seen here in mid-October, but it never vocalized, preventing identification to species. Two Vermilion Flycatchers were observed along the C111 Canal in early November, and an Ash-throated Flycatcher was spotted nearby at the end of the month. Also by late November, Brown-crested Flycatchers had arrived in the Royal Palm area of the national park, where they winter each year. Western Tanagers appeared at several locations this fall, including A.D. Barnes Park in Miami, and Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park in Key West.

During August and into September, impressive numbers of Wilson’s Phalaropes descended upon a flooded field on CR 880 in the Everglades Agricultural Area south of Lake Okeechobee; two Red-
Among the many ducks at Merritt Island for the fifth consecutive autumn. A greater White-fronted Goose in Homestead and a teal at Bunche Beach in Lee County. An American Flamingo was discovered there in October; up to 20 were counted in Florida Bay during November. Unusual waterfowl sighted this fall included a Greater White-fronted Goose in Homestead and a teal at Green Cay Wetlands in Palm Beach County that was likely a Cinnamon x Blue-winged hybrid.

Among the many shorebirds seen during the season at Bunche Beach in Lee County. An American Flamingo was discovered there in October; up to 20 were counted in Florida Bay during November. Unusual waterfowl sighted this fall included a Greater White-fronted Goose in Homestead and a teal at Green Cay Wetlands in Palm Beach County that was likely a Cinnamon x Blue-winged hybrid.

Farther afield, a pasture in the Lake Apopka area near Orlando hosted a Say’s Phoebe for the fifth consecutive autumn. Among the many ducks at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge in Brevard County, birders spotted as many as four Eurasian Wigeon, plus both Surf and White-winged Scoter. An impressive list of western vagrants were found in Florida’s panhandle during the season, including Golden Eagle, White-faced Ibis, Hudsonian Godwit, Broad-billed, Kirtland’s Warbler

Brian Rapoza, is field trip coordinator for TAS and has organized and led birding trips for the organization throughout Florida as well as in several other states. See the Ecuador trip article in this issue.
It goes on to say that “The extensive dredge and fill activities that occurred in the late 1960s spawned this widespread public concern.” Biscayne Bay itself has experienced severe and extensive dredging and filling, which have destroyed the bay bottom, and has been subjected to the negative effects of artificial shorelines replacing natural ones and a drainage canal system that altered the Everglades ecosystem — of which Biscayne Bay is a part. These factors have forever changed the quality and quantity of much-needed freshwater delivered to the bay. Although raw sewage is no longer dumped into the system — the practice ended only decades ago, in the 1950s — the bay still receives the storm water and associated contaminants from upwards of 40 municipalities that lie along the bay and inland. Today, active management of the bay by the Aquatic Preserve staff, along with local and federal agencies, such as Miami-Dade County and Biscayne National Park, has helped this resilient system rebound. Thankfully, it remains one of the world’s most prized estuaries and ecotourism destination spots.

But the protection afforded the preserves since the 1970s recently came under direct attack. During the 2011-2012 legislative session, the elected state representatives who authored and/or supported House Bill 503 (and its companion Senate Bill 716, now under consideration) sought to undo the very protection that makes Biscayne Bay unique among the state’s aquatic preserves: the bills proposed to rescind the requirement that applicants who seek to lease state-owned submerged lands must demonstrate that an “extreme hardship” has been imposed upon them. This extreme hardship provision currently requires that the Board of Trustees of the state of Florida, who hold title to sovereignty submerged lands (state-owned lands), decide the fate of applications that seek to turn our publicly owned submerged land into leased property and essentially preempt the public from being able to use it for water-dependent activities, as the law protecting the preserve intended. If passed, the law would have changed for “certain municipalities,” as it was stated in the bills.

In January, TAS, along with other organizations, worked diligently to bring this issue to the forefront, and TAS met with lawmakers and their aides directly on the issue. In speaking with House Representatives, TAS learned that one developer in particular wrote this incendiary language with a specific project in mind. The objective of this developer — who wields enough money and power to proffer the language of a legislative bill and successfully move it through several House committees — is to fill in thousands of feet of publicly owned submerged lands along an island in North Bay Village. The newly filled-in bay bottom will serve as a “baywalk” along the strip club complex the developer proposes. Although emphatically opposed by North Bay Village residents, it looks as if this project will happen. In an understandable move to prevent House Bill 503 from passing with language that threatened all of the publicly owned land in the Biscayne Bay Aquatic Preserves (the rescinding of the “extreme hardship” requirement), the Department of Environmental Protection conceded that it would work with the developer to get his project done if he agreed to strike that language (“Section 5”) from both the House and Senate bills.

Although this is a small victory for the bay, it remains that this developer’s project will make the Preserve’s boundaries smaller by filling in submerged lands that would otherwise be used for boating, swimming and fishing, and it will destroy any seagrasses, sponges,
corals and other organisms that live there. Thousands of acres of submerged lands in Biscayne Bay have already been deed and leased away (from the early 1900s until aquatic preserve protections were put in place), and the media have recently published articles about the measly amount of money that submerged lands lease holders are required to pay to the state.

If the House and Senate bills had passed as they were originally written, they would have allowed for rampant dredging and filling to create “waterfront promenades” not only in North Bay Village but anywhere in the Biscayne Bay Aquatic Preserves; the bills would have made it far easier to obtain permits (with less oversight by state staff) and to go beyond the provisions that already allow for dredging and filling.

Unfortunately, even without the deleted language, these bills will likely have many egregious effects. For example, they will:

• Change how coastal permits are issued, prohibiting turbidity and sediment quality standards that may be needed beyond current state standards to protect the bay during coastal construction;
• Allow permits to be issued ahead of rulings on how proposed construction will affect species listed under the Endangered Species Act;
• Prohibit a county agency from requiring that an applicant first acquire proper approvals from state and federal agencies before the county issues a permit;
• Allow a general permit to be granted for the construction, alteration, and maintenance of a surface water management system — without any agency action by DEP or by the South Florida Water Management District.

As we face these attacks on our local environment, it’s easy to become discouraged and overwhelmed, and to feel helpless about what to do. On an individual level, we might indeed be powerless to stop the proposed changes. But together we are powerful. With your support, TAS fought back against House Bill 503, and as a result there will be less destruction than there would have been had we not acted. There may still be more to do on this issue to protect our precious Biscayne Bay, but we overcame our first challenge — to defeat the language in the bill that would undo decades-old protections for Biscayne Bay.

And let’s recall another recent success made possible by community action. During last year’s legislative session, when the funds to manage our aquatic preserves were stripped from the budget and the Biscayne Bay Aquatic Preserves field office was set to close on July 1, 2011, TAS mobilized volunteers, members and board leadership, and galvanized support from our closest partner organizations. In an aggressive call-your-legislator campaign, TAS and partner organizations collectively placed hundreds of phone calls. We sent letters. We had articles published in the Miami Herald. We garnered support from local and state officials. The collective action of individuals came to represent the sentiment of a large constituency, and it caught the ears of our elected officials. On April 28, 2011, I received a phone call from the aide of the senior legislator who sat on the committee deciding this part of the budget. It was a conversation I won’t soon forget. It went something like this:

“The senator doesn’t know much about these aquatic preserves, but people obviously care a lot about them. The phones haven’t stopped ringing. It’s been decided that funding for Biscayne Bay and Estero Bay Aquatic Preserves will remain intact. Thank you for your call.”

Also of note: We worked with other statewide partners to block last year’s “monster bill” that would have rolled back a multitude of decades-old environmental protection laws, and would have been far worse than what we ended up with after the last legislative session.

These significant successes are the direct result of our membership’s time and effort, as well as our community’s love of Biscayne Bay and the natural beauty we all cherish and enjoy in South Florida.

Tropical Audubon Society has been an advocate for Biscayne Bay since our founding more than 60 years ago. We can all be proud of the good work we’ve accomplished together. While protection for Biscayne Bay and other natural resources remain under attack, we need to keep sending a loud and clear message to our legislators. We have already proven that collective action can yield results. You will receive a TAS Constant Contact alert the next time we need to enlist your powerful voice. Roger Hammer, TAS Board Member and Naturalist, reminds us that “Biscayne Bay is here, and you — the public — own it. Because you own it, your voice should be heard by politicians and planners, to help ensure that it remains accessible and enjoyable to the public.”

Unfortunately, filling in Biscayne Bay means there will be less for future generations to enjoy.

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Audubon Wish List

**Donation Items**

- iPads
- Laptop Computers
- Desktop Computers
- New Copy Machine
- Video Production Equipment
- DSL Video Camera
- Binoculars
- Telescope and Tripod

**In Kind**

- Website Design
- Digital Design
- Grounds Maintenance
- Fence Repair
- Docents for Tours of the Doc Thomas House
- Secretarial Services
- Grant Writing
- Newsletter Contributions (Writing & Images)
Last July, Brian Rapoza and Joe Barros led a nine-day Tropical Audubon birding trip to Ecuador. This is Part Two of Brian's trip report. Part One was published in the Fall 2011 issue of this publication.

On the eastern side of the Andes, the drive from Quito took us through Papallacta Pass, which, at 13,400 feet was the highest elevation of our tour. Joe's group, which visited this area first, had to deal with heavy rains that limited birding opportunities. In addition, landslides along the road east of Papallacta slowed their progress to lower elevations. By the time my group arrived three days later, the heavy rains had ended and the roads had been cleared enough to allow traffic to proceed somewhat normally. On the drive up to a series of microwave towers on the mountain peak above the pass, the spectacular, snow-capped peak of Antisana Volcano was clearly visible to the south. Despite our guide Jose's thorough search of the wet paramo habitat, still covered by patches of snow, that surrounded the towers, we failed to find our main target bird for this stop, the Rufous-breasted Seedsnipe. Both tour groups saw Andean Condors while here; other paramo species also were seen, including Blue-mantled Thornbill, Chestnut-winged and Stout-billed Cinclodes, Andean Tit-Spinetail, Many-striped Canastero, Tawny Antpitta, Paramo Ground-Tyrant, Grass Wren and Plumbeous Sierra-Finch. Better weather also allowed my group to explore Polylepis habitat downslope from the pass, where we found Red-rumped Bush-Tyrant, Giant Conebill and Black-backed Bush-Tanager. We scoped the lakes between the pass and the town of Papallacta, discovering Andean Teal, Yellow-billed Pintail, Andean Ruddy-Duck and Andean Coot. A Great Horned Owl and a Paramo Fox were also spotted here.

Our next stop was Guango Lodge, located just east of Papallacta (and the landslides), at an elevation of almost 9,000 feet. We stayed overnight (it was a bit chilly), while Joe's group simply stopped by for a couple of hours of birding before continuing east. At Guango, we enjoyed an in-your-face hummingbird experience; many of the hummers visiting the lodge's feeders would fearlessly hover inches from our faces as we breathlessly watched. Species recorded here included Speckled Hummingbird, Collared Inca, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Sword-billed Hummingbird, Chestnut-breasted Coronet, Tourmaline Sunangel, Tyrian Metaltail and Long-tailed Sylph. Walking around the grounds, we also found Pearled Treerunner, White-banded Tyrannulet, Rufous-breasted Chat-Tyrant, Red-crested Cotinga, Capped Conebill, Buff-breasted Mountain-Tanager, Gray-hooded Bush-Tanager, Pale-naped Slaty and Stripe-headed Brush-Finch and Northern Mountain Cacique.

Joe's group stayed the first two nights of the trip, and my group the last two, at Cabanas San Isidro, a lodge located in subtropical cloud forest at an elevation of about 6,750 feet. During the drive to the lodge, we scanned every visible section of the raging river that paralleled the highway, hoping for Torrent Duck, White-capped Dipper and Torrent Tyrannulet, three river rapid specialists. By the time we reached San Isidro, we had sighted all three. Both Cabanas San Isidro and Guango Lodge are owned by Mitch Lysinger and his wife Carmen; Mitch is the son of TAS member David Lysinger. Mitch, who has a home in Quito, arranged to be at San Isidro to greet Joe's group when they arrived. The lodge has a number of hummingbird feeders, many just outside the cabins; the only new hummer seen here, though, was Bronzy Inca. At both dusk and dawn, Joe's group watched Rufous-bellied Nighthawks feeding around the lodge's streetlights, but the birds were no-shows by the time my group arrived. Some of the group made up for that miss by finding a Rufous-banded Owl near one of the cabins during an after-dark search. Sharp-eyed participant Ann Wiley even spotted an Oilbird as it flew across the face of the full moon; José assisted in the identification of the silhouetted bird. Both groups heard, but did not see, San...
Isidro’s famous “mystery owl,” which nests near the lodge and is considered by some to be a new species.

The lodge proved to be very birdy during the day as well. Species seen within its grounds included Masked Trogon, Emerald Toucanet, Rufous-crowned Tody-Flycatcher, Handsome Flycatcher (dubbed “Guapo” Flycatcher by Jose), Pale-edged and Golden-crowned Flycatcher, Barred Becard, Inca Jay, Black-billed Peppershrike, Glossy-black Thrush, Plain-tailed and Mountain Wren, Subtropical Cacique and Russet-backed Oropendola. Taking a page from Angel Paz’s playbook, a lodge employee used worms to bring a White-bellied Antpitta into the open. A walk along Yanayacu road, near the lodge, added Roadside and White-rumped Hawk, Southern Lapwing, White-capped Parrot, Crested Quetzal, Rufous Spinetail, Long-tailed Antbird, Blackish and Long-tailed Tapaculo, Sulphur-bellied Tyrannulet, Rufous-breasted and Lemon-browed Flycatcher, Golden-collared Honeycreeper, Bluish Flowerpiercer, Saffron-crowned, Black-capped and White-capped Tanager, Black-eared Hemispingus and Olivacious Siskin. Species found during a visit to Borja Road, near the town of Baeza and at a slightly lower elevation than the lodge, included Chestnut-collared Swift, Green-fronted Lancebill, Andean Motmot, Ash-browed Spinetail, Streaked Xenops, Black-billed Thrush, Gray-mantled Wren, Yellow-browed Sparrow and Red-breasted Blackbird.

Both of our groups paid a visit at dusk to a highway overlook at Guacamayos Ridge, a known roosting area for both Swallow-tailed Nightjar and Andean Potoo. Neither group found the Potoo, but both had spotlight views of the Nightjar, though a thunderstorm cut short the visit for my group. Each group returned to Guacamayos Ridge the next morning, but heavy rain prevented Joe’s group from hiking the trail that begins at the overlook. Better weather greeted us upon our return to the ridge, so we were able to hike the ridge trail. Our itinerary described this trail as the most difficult of the trip, but although the previous night’s rains resulted in a few slips along the way, the trail was easier to navigate than anticipated. Unfortunately, the birding was not as productive as expected, and we added only a handful of new species to our trip list, including Chestnut-crowned Antpitta (heard only) and Rufous-headed Pygmy-Tyrant. Also encountered were Andean Guan, Green-and-black Fruiteater, Hooded Mountain-Tanager and Grass-green Tanager.

Meanwhile, Joe’s group not only found better weather at a lower elevation, they saw a plethora of birds, including a few that weren’t even on the trip checklist!
In October, 2011, the TAS board voted to establish an urban nature center at the society’s Sunset Drive property and to name it the Steinberg Nature Center, in honor and appreciation of Alan Steinberg’s more than 30 years of service to TAS as an officer and benefactor and his half century of devotion to the environment. A dedication of the Center will take place on Sunday, March 11 from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF COMBINED SERVICE BEGAN WITH TROPICAL AUDUBON

ALAN AND SUE STEINBERG were on their honeymoon in Miami Beach in 1959 when they fortuitously came upon a newspaper notice by the Tropical Audubon Society offering a two day privately guided trip into Everglades National Park.

After the newlyweds signed up and spent two days with TAS guide Dick Cunningham, nothing could stop them from becoming lifelong birdwatchers and environmentalists. The trip included two boat rides and an overnight stay at the Flamingo Lodge. This experience apparently was shared by many other converts to nature, including Russell Peterson, former Governor of Delaware and President of The National Audubon Society, who told Alan about his own inspirational trip.

After returning to New York, Alan joined and shortly became a trustee of the Scarsdale Audubon Society, and Sue started a “career” as a volunteer at the New York Botanical Garden. They continued these activities until they moved to Florida in 1978.

Once settled in Coral Gables, Sue volunteered at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, where she drew on her experience in New York to develop a program to bring fifth-grade students to visit the Garden. This was the start of a K-12 program that now brings tens of thousands of students to Fairchild each year.

At the suggestion of Bob Kelley (later president of TAS) Alan joined the board of TAS. As a chapter delegate to the Florida Audubon Society, he was nominated by Karsten Rist (later president of TAS) and served as treasurer of the Florida Audubon Society.

Some years later, Alan became treasurer of the Florida chapter of The Nature Conservancy and also served on its Executive Committee. He remains a member of the Chairman’s Council.

On the national scene, Alan served as chairman of the board of Defenders of Wildlife, in Washington, D.C. Defenders now has more than 1 million members and supporters. Alan is now a director emeritus.

Alan’s long term focus has always remained with TAS and memories of that initial trip. He is currently the longest-serving member of our board.

Alan is an active birdwatcher and boater and a member of the Stiltsville Committee. He is listed in “Who’s Who in America” and is an avid collector of art and books about birds.
**While sitting** at one of the picnic tables at the Steinberg Nature Center on a recent afternoon, I watched a Northern Mockingbird fly down from its high perch to feed on Wild Coffee berries behind the Doc Thomas House. Then I heard a cat-like cry coming from within the bush. On investigation, I discovered a Gray Catbird. The Catbird, a winter visitor, is smaller than the mockingbird, but has the same general shape. It is gray-colored with a dark cap. While the Mockingbird is brash and likes the highest perch around, the Catbird is secretive and generally prefers interior branches. When the Catbird flies, it usually makes a quick flight from one bush to another. The flight pattern on migration is another matter, but you probably will never see a Catbird flying on migration because it almost always takes place at night.

This encounter took me back to when I was 11 years old. My school class had gone on a field trip to the Anhinga Trail in Everglades National Park. This is a great place for a first exposure to nature. There are a number of species of big birds that stand still, and they are often very close to the path. Our teacher loved birds and encouraged each of us to see and understand as much as possible. A few months later, I received a copy of “Birds in Florida” for my 12th birthday (I still have it). The field trip, the teacher’s encouragement and the gift inspired many afternoons of exploring the nearby woods, book in hand, looking for Mockingbirds, Catbirds, Cardinals, Blue Jays and anything else that flew or crawled. My interest in birds and nature has endured through the years.

Looking back, I now understand that I was the beneficiary of **Opportunity, Encouragement** and **Tools**. Our vision for the Steinberg Nature Center at Tropical Audubon is that it will be a place where future generations can similarly benefit from **Opportunity, Encouragement** and **Tools**. Just how all of this will play out is not yet clear. One of our greatest challenges will be reaching out and connecting with communities that have not traditionally been part of the environmental movement.

I encourage readers to stop by the Steinberg Nature Center at Tropical Audubon Society. Once you step foot on the property, you will be transported back in time by the native trees and plants, and the historic Doc Thomas House. Pick up a “Bird Friendly Native Plants” brochure, and observe many of the plants it cites, many of which are now marked with botanic tags. Test your skill at finding some of the property’s many resident or migratory birds. We will soon be adding more elements to enhance your experience: interpretative materials about the Atlantic Flyway, our restored Pine Rockland and our Rockland Hammock. Bring a friend, bring a child, bring a group or come by yourself. Engage in some structured learning about nature — or just relax and unwind, and be open to the mysteries of nature.

Tropical Audubon Society is located one block from the urban core of South Miami. A vision becomes a reality only through hard work. Much hard work has been done. Much more remains to be done.

The last time a map was published of the Tropical Audubon Society grounds was in 1990; much of this was a vision of David Lysinger, who felt an arboretum style tree museum depicting plant communities by region would be the best way to catalog plants for educational purposes. Later, George Gann led TAS to restore to near native communities of rockland hammock and pine rockland (currently not depicted on this map). Since 1995, when Roger Hammer and later John Ogden documented the importance of the native plant communities for feeding migrating song birds, we started ensuring that our property included many of these species. Under the leadership of Lewis “Brother” Milledge and the energetic grounds committee, we now have added many of the species that are the most important for natural bird food.

Today the buildings remain the same; most of the changes and improvements are to the plant community and functional use of space, to improve education and interpretation. We hope this map will serve as a springboard for the future planning of the Steinberg Nature Center. Just a glimpse at this oasis, even from this rendering, is sure to inspire you to get involved or become a benefactor and help TAS continue to maintain and improve South Miami’s gem so future generations can come and learn about native habitats and an intact slice of “old Florida.”
Brown Pelicans Decline

By John C. Ogden

‘60s due to pesticide contamination, especially along the Texas and Louisiana coasts. The number of pelicans nesting in these two states plummeted from an estimated 15,000 pairs to less than 10 pairs. The Brown Pelican was placed on the federal list of endangered species in 1970, and DDT was banned in 1972. Thereafter, pelicans quickly recovered, and by the 1990s there were an estimated 20,000 to 25,000 pairs nesting along the Gulf Coast, including Florida.

Brown Pelicans in Florida were relatively unaffected by pesticides, but they have faced other problems, such as oil spills, variations in prey abundance caused by water-management practices and water-quality issues, human disturbance of nesting colonies, and injuries from fishing equipment. During the late 1970s, ornithologist and pelican expert Ralph Schreiber estimated that 80 percent of the pelicans he handled had at some point been injured by fishing hooks or monofilament line. In spite of these problems, Florida’s Brown Pelican population slowly increased over several decades: During the 1960s and ’70s, there were 6,000 to 8,000 nesting pairs each year in Florida; since the 1980s, between 8,000 to 10,000 pairs have nested here each year. The highest number documented was 12,300 pairs in 1989. The location and size of nesting colonies in Florida also fluctuated over time, apparently in response to more local changes in environmental conditions.

In extreme southern Florida, however, the story of Brown Pelicans has been substantially different. When I flew annual aerial surveys over Florida Bay during the 1960s and ’70s, we estimated a healthy nesting population of pelicans in the Bay — more than 500 pairs in five to eight nesting colonies. Yet in 1981, biologists

A LOSS FOR THE EVERGLADES

A GAIN FOR FIU

By Lauren McGurk

The last buffer of land between the Everglades and the urban sprawl of Miami-Dade is now the potential new site of the Miami-Dade County Fairgrounds. Known as Bird Drive Recharge Area, this area was identified long ago as important wetlands with the ability to recharge the West Wellfield of Miami-Dade County. In 2004 it became one of more than 60 projects that make up the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan, the main goals being that it would reduce seepage from Everglades National Park, recharge groundwater and increase the spatial extent of wetlands. Florida International University now seeks to acquire a large area of this parcel to accommodate its “growth plan.” As proposed, FIU plans to swap the current Miami-Dade County Fairgrounds with this large parcel in order to expand its medical school. At workshops attended by stakeholders, FIU has consistently requested that the process be expedited to accommodate the university’s needs.

Bird Drive Recharge Area project has faced several challenges since its implementation. In June 2008 the CERP Project Delivery Team prepared a white paper that evaluated the costs and benefits of the project and deemed it “not implementable.” Despite this conclusion, many respected scientists in the environmental community believe that even keeping the Bird Drive Recharge Area in its current state — with no project — would be more beneficial than an alternative plan that the staff of the South Florida Water Management District has proposed. Several scientists in the environmental community also believe that the existing CERP plan could be modified to make it viable and implementable, and that the plan should not be abandoned.

The SFWMD’s alternative plan would construct a new canal along Krome Avenue and improve an already existing L-31 canal. At public meetings, however, the point has been raised that the proposed concept does not achieve the goals that were intended with the original Bird Drive Recharge Area project. The new concept would not be able to reduce seepage, and it would store only around half the groundwater that the area was intended to store. In addition, the proposed concept does not increase the spatial extent of wetlands. Instead, it reduces the spatial extent of wetlands substantially, leaving a large portion of the area vulnerable to urbanization. Lastly, the project does not even have a proposed implementation date, so this plan could sit for years without being afforded any kind of action by the state or federal government.

One of the largest parcels of land in the northeast corner is a key part of FIU’s plans. FIU executives are proposing to acquire the land currently used by the Miami-Dade Fairgrounds — land that FIU would use to expand its Maidique Campus — and purchase the northeast parcel of land in the Bird Drive Recharge Area for the new location of the fairgrounds. In order to make this land suitable for the fairgrounds, as well as for a proposed park and other facilities, 320 acres of wetlands would have to be filled in. FIU is pushing for their proposal to go through as quickly as possible, despite the fact that many important issues that involve Bird Drive Basin, including the viability of the project, proposed expansions of SR-836 and Florida Power and Light interests have not been fully vetted by the community. FIU claims that the proposal must go through because of its “growth plan” to expand the campus to accommodate more students. They are headed into their five-year planning horizon, and as FIU’s Vice President for Governmental Relations Steve Sauls puts it, they are concerned because they are out of land.

Recently it has come to Tropical Audubon’s attention that FIU wants the upper northeast corner of the Bird Drive Recharge Area immediately transferred directly to them before the rest of the area goes through the workshop process. After talks with staff, the District has indicated that the parcel FIU wishes to acquire is not within the District’s control. FIU would therefore need to go to the state’s Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund in order to acquire the property. In this case, the District would only be involved in lifting
Jim Kushlan and Paula Frohring estimated that the nesting population in Florida Bay had declined by 40 percent. This decline has apparently continued; Sonny Bass, a biologist at Everglades National Park, notes that the most recent surveys, conducted in 2007, located only about 150 pelican nests. Tom Wilmers, a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, reports that nesting Brown Pelicans have also declined in the lower Florida Keys. Wilmers tells us that the Cottrell Key colony declined from 110 pairs in 1991 to 13 pairs in 2010, and that two other known colonies have been abandoned altogether: East Bahia Honda since 1993 and the Marquesas Keys since 2005. Kushlan and Frohring suggested that the decline they observed in Florida Bay had been caused by changes in food availability, while Wilmers mentions several instances of human disturbances at nesting colonies in the lower Keys. The substantial decline of nesting Brown Pelicans in Florida Bay and in the Florida Keys is in conspicuous contrast to the story elsewhere in Florida, and strongly suggests that our pelicans are being seriously stressed by local factors. What I find especially alarming is that there are also comparable declines in the numbers of other fish-eating birds nesting in Florida Bay, including Double-crested Cormorants, Osprey (down from 200 pairs in 1970 to 60 pairs recently!), Bald Eagles, Roseate Spoonbills and Reddish Egrets.

I have had many long conversations with Jerry Lorenz, Director of the Audubon Science Center in Tavernier, and we agree that the major factors responsible for these tragic declines must be the radical reduction in freshwater flows into Florida Bay caused by Everglades drainage and water management practices, and the resulting sharp increases in salinity in the Bay. In one way or another, changes in Florida Bay salinities must be reducing the numbers and altering the species composition or distribution of many of the food fishes for these water birds.

For those of us who are familiar with the abundance of wildlife that characterized Florida Bay during the 1960s and ’70s, the current Bay is a mere ghost of its former self, in more ways than one. Certainly the future trends of Pelicans, and of the other water birds that are such good indicators of environmental health, will tell the tale of Everglades restoration: how well it is working, and whether it is working quickly enough to avoid irreversible changes to Florida Bay.

“...He can take in his beak food enough for a week. But I’m darned if I know how the helican.” And so ends Dixon Merritt’s limerick. When I was a junior birdwatcher in Tennessee many, many years ago, I had the privilege of sitting at Dixon’s feet (literally) and hearing him recite this limerick. Little did we realize as we sat in that cozy room in a Tennessee farmhouse what hazards lay ahead for the Brown Pelican.

Photo left © John C. Avise

any deed restrictions on the parcel that FIU is seeking to acquire. Currently, FIU is seeking to have an amendment to a proposed bill passed through the Legislature, sponsored by House Representative Jeanette M. Nunez. As of February 21, 2012, an amendment was filed to House Bill 449. The bill had already passed through a number of committees; now, all that stands between FIU and the destruction of the last buffer of the Everglades is a floor vote in the Florida Legislature.

The bill proposes to have the Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund lease to FIU the northeast parcel of 350 acres of the Bird Drive Recharge Area. Through the bill, FIU would have the right to sublease the land in order for the Miami-Dade Fairgrounds to be moved there, and the District would be required to lift any interest on this parcel and transfer such interest to other projects. The deed restrictions currently in place require the land to be used for Everglades Restoration projects. If the state transfers these lands to FIU, and the District lifts this deed restriction, a violation of the public trust has occurred and no transfer of funds will be made to other Everglades projects.

FIU is not currently in talks with SFWMD staff about the university’s proposals for use of this land, nor are they in negotiations about how the land will potentially be used. Without FIU communicating to the public its plans for the use of Bird Drive Recharge Area, how can Miami-Dade be assured that the last barrier to the Everglades from urban development is protected? It seems as though for at least the past 18 months the Miami-Dade parks department, wanting to ensure that no other developer would acquire this parcel, has stepped in to ensure their open space master plan would be maintained. However, if filling and paving this land to accommodate the fairgrounds is the only option, then environmental groups will not support this effort. A better choice would be to have FIU trade this parcel with the county, find a new site for the fairgrounds within the UDB and potentially transfer this parcel to the Environmentally Endangered Lands Program. This would keep the area in the business of recharging our aquifer and helping deal with seepage management issues still unresolved in the effort to restore America’s Everglades.

Putting FIU’s interests for expansion above the community’s needs is the wrong decision. Citizens of Miami-Dade must assert that FIU’s expansion plans do not come before the water supply needs of the county’s residents, or before the interests of residents who enjoy the fairground. A new fairground should be relocated somewhere within the corridor, since putting it on the edge of nowhere will not serve the community. In addition, the county might have to pay up to $12 million in mitigation and permit fees to fill in the acreage needed for a fairground. So the taxpayer will be on the hook for this, in addition to a more costly water supply down the road. The more wetlands we use, the closer we come to dependence on reverse osmosis, which is estimated to cost 6 percent more than reliance on aquifer recharge from the Everglades.
six active sites in Palm Beach County, two in Broward County, one in Miami-Dade County and 21 in Monroe County. Fourteen of the sites were new; 16 had been observed in previous years.

Rooftop nesting birds, usually Least Terns, scrape nests in the gravel as they would scrape in the sand on a beach. They can be monitored from the ground (and counted as they fly) or from neighboring rooftops. One of the hazards of rooftop nesting is that chicks often fall off the edge or down a drainpipe. In Tampa, volunteers have organized a “chick checking” program; they rescue fallen babies and return them to the roof using a contraption called a “chick-a-boom”: They place the chick into a juice box that is attached to the end of a long plastic pipe, lift it up to the roof, and pull a string to open the box lid.

Wintering data
South Florida’s birders will have more reasons to get involved when the wintering database is up and running. For example, ornithologist John Ogden said, “There are an immense number of sandpipers that are not being closely monitored at all, except for the Christmas counts.”

Oron “Sonny” Bass, a biologist based in Everglades National Park, has expressed an interest in joining an FSA partnership. “Tens of thousands of birds winter in the park – it’s one of the largest wintering areas in the state for shorebirds,” he said.

Other promising areas include Key Biscayne, Virginia Key and Oleta River State Park in Miami-Dade County, and West Lake Park in Broward County. Zambrano notes that FWC doesn’t have much information on wintering birds in these areas. “There are a few species in particular that we’d be interested in learning more about, such as Piping Plovers.”

The small shorebird is a threatened and endangered species whose numbers have drastically declined in recent decades. This year, about 36 Piping Plovers are wintering on the mudflats of Crandon Park Beach near the lifeguard stations, said Robin Diaz, a retired microbiologist and schoolteacher who lives on Key Biscayne. “Crandon is the only perfect beach for them south of Daytona,” she said. Diaz already participates in several Piping Plover surveys, and said she will be glad to submit her data to the FSD too, especially if there is an active FSA partnership that she can join.

At the beach on a recent Saturday morning, Jim King, an interpretive nature coordinator with the Miami-Dade County Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces department, led a group of birders who identified many species of wintering birds searching for crustaceans on the mudflats, including Gannets, Royal Terns, Lesser Black-backed Gulls, and Piping, Wilson’s and Black-bellied Plovers.

King said a database like the FSD would give credibility to conservationists’ claims that the beach is being utilized by birds, and could make a difference in a place like Crandon Park, where both birds’ needs and peoples’ needs have to be considered. For example, sand dunes that were destroyed when the park was created are slowly being restored; on cold, windy days, birds huddle in the dunes, sheltering from blowing sand. King said the department could join an FSA partnership in South Florida, and he hopes one will be formed soon.

Partnerships
FWC’s recently appointed Shorebird Partnership Coordinator, Naomi Avissar, said one of her goals is to reach out and help start new partnerships in the coastal areas where there are none — South Florida and the Space Coast. She hopes to tour the state later this year, checking in with existing partnerships and meeting people who are interested in forming new ones, including TAS and other Audubon chapters.

Once a new partnership has been established, FWC will train volunteers and provide information such as the locations of sites, Zambrano said. Typically, a partnership will hold a pre-season and a post-season meeting; ideally, a partnership will include participants from three or four counties, who can come together for each meeting. All it really takes to form a partnership is a handful of people getting together and making a plan as to who is going to do what, Avissar said. The groups tend to be social and informal. While there are some individuals who work independently, Avissar recommends partnerships because they make the most of the available resources, and because teamwork can be easier. “You don’t need a group, but it’s always nice to have one.”

For more information, check out the websites of the FSA: fshellshorebirdalliance.org ~ and the FSD: fshellshorebirddatabase.org ~ and watch the TAS website.

LEARN ABOUT FSD WITH UPCOMING WEBINARS
Naomi Avissar, Shorebird Partnership Coordinator for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, will be holding a series of webinars on how to use the Florida Shorebird Database. Anyone who is interested can participate.

FSD for Beginners WEBINAR
(Introduction to the protocol and database basics. Strongly recommended for new shorebird monitors and FSD users)

Sunday, March 11, 10 a.m. – noon
Tuesday, March 13, 2 – 4 p.m.

FSD Refresher Course WEBINAR
(Highlights updates to the protocol and reviews FAQs. Recommended for all FSD users)

Sunday, March 11, 1 – 2 p.m.
Thursday, March 15, 1 – 2 p.m.

Pre-register for all webinars at shorebird@myfwc.com
The following generous individuals and foundations have contributed to TAS since our last publication. We GREATLY appreciate their support!

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Marian Avello
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Mr. David Ball
Emie Barnett

Kara Sable Seaside Sparrow and below

Sundance Quickprint
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Catherine Repele
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Mr. George R. Van Wyck

Together Green, a partnership with Audubon & Audubon

Florida — a role that includes helping preserve our community’s natural resources and enhancing our quality of life.

Introduce potential new patrons to each restaurant, while adding to raising funds for capital improvements, is symbiotic: elevating TAS’s profile as the Voice of Conservation in South Florida — a role that includes helping preserve our community’s natural resources and enhancing our quality of life.

Dine Out with Tropical Audubon Society

TAS hatches dining partnership with trio of popular South Miami restaurants

To help Tropical Audubon Society feather its proverbial nest, Whisk Gourmet, George’s and Town Kitchen & Bar dedicated ten percent of dinner checks from designated dates in November, December and January (consecutive first Tuesdays of each month) to Tropical Audubon Society. Each Dining Partner is a TAS neighbor, located within one or two blocks of our South Miami headquarters. In the spirit of philanthropy and community, the owners of each restaurant met with TAS outreach coordinator Stephanie Cornejo and board member Elizabeth Smith in the early fall to “hatch” what is hoped to be an ongoing “Dine Out with Tropical Audubon Society” partnership. The program’s goal, in addition to raising funds for capital improvements, is symbiotic: introduce potential new patrons to each restaurant, while elevating TAS’s profile as the Voice of Conservation in South Florida — a role that includes helping preserve our community’s natural resources and enhancing our quality of life.

Dine Out with Tropical Audubon Society

Upcoming Dine-Out Dates:

Tuesday March 6th
George’s in South Miami

Tuesday April 3rd
Town Kitchen and Bar

Tuesday May 1st
Whisk Gourmet
Tropical Audubon’s 2012 Conservation Concert Series is underway. Now in its third season, the series continues to gain momentum. High Pines resident Dr. Steve Chavoustie and fellow members of Nightscape inaugurated the concert series on January 28, rocking the old Doc Thomas House and grounds once again. On February 25, folk-rockers Solar Dogs will return for their second season. March 31, The Members are set to take the stage for their third consecutive series appearance; the fourth and final concert will take place April 28th, with the band to be announced. No matter who is playing, however, concert goers will be swaying to the music, singing along to classics from the ’60s, ’70s, ’80s and ’90s, and dancing barefoot on the lawn. Attendees are encouraged to pack a picnic, bring a blanket, their sweetie, their children, or a friend and come out to enjoy a laid-back “Old Florida” evening. A donation Bird Bar provides liquid refreshment in the form of beer, wine or water. Picnic tables are available on a first-come basis.

Events will take place at TAS’s Doc Thomas House, 5530 Sunset Drive, South Miami 33143. 305-667-7337

Limited free parking on TAS grounds and along 56th Avenue. Metered parking available on Sunset Drive.

Concert Proceeds will benefit capital improvements to the grounds and historic buildings.