



The e Hummingbird

WEST VOLUSIA AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC., DELAND, FLORIDA
A Chapter of Audubon of Florida and National Audubon Society

West Volusia Audubon is Committed to Ongoing Stewardship and Enjoyment of the Natural World

October 2021

President's Letter



The Eagles are back at their nest VO105 near Beresford Trail. EagleWatch started October 1st and I'm happy our pair have returned this season. We hope they are successful

again. Warblers are passing through and Painted Buntings and American Redstarts have been reported. It's nice to hear Gray Catbirds again along the bike trail and in our yard.



PAIR OF EAGLES



VIVIENNE POWIS AND
CONNOR WAGNER

Vivienne Powis and I road our bikes into Blue Spring State Park and stopped to talk to the new Park Services Specialist and volunteer manager, Connor Wagner. He would like to promote the park to visitors as a prime birding location. He would

like to establish a "JayWalk" program that would be a short walk into the scrub to learn about Scrub Jays, their habitat, and hopefully see some. Scrub Jays are here year-round and we are fortunate they are in the area.

I stopped by the Stetson Aquatic Center on Lake Beresford this week and took a few photos. There's a small park open to the public that has a short trail with signage and wildflowers, a canoe/kayak launch and a restroom. I sometimes see Limpkins along the lakeshore and Eagles may flyover. It's located at 2636 Alhambra Ave. in DeLand.



STETSON AQUATIC CENTER

In my last letter I talked about Victor Johnson and the Whooping Crane that visited their yard several years ago. I am sorry to say that he passed away

unexpectedly. I am so glad we had such a nice chat never thinking that would be the last time. Vic and Gloria were loved by all that knew them and did a lot for West Volusia Audubon. They welcomed people to their yard to see the wildlife including egrets, ducks, cranes, hummingbirds and more. They will be missed and our condolences to their family.

I hope to see you at the Purple Martin House dedication at Mill Lake Park in Orange City on November 8th at 11 am. I want to thank Fred and Suze Peace who donated it in honor of our 60th Anniversary. We hope to see some birds afterwards at the park.

Happy Fall 🍁 🍂

Arnette Sherman, President

West Volusia Audubon Meeting Zoom Virtual Meeting

“Drying Up – The Fresh Water Crisis in Florida”

The West Volusia Audubon Society is partnering with the Venice Area Audubon Society to bring you this free presentation.

Advance registration is not required. Just click the link at presentation time.

Time: October 26, 2021, 6:30 PM

[Link for Meeting](#)

Meeting ID: 919 7579 6857

Passcode: VAAS



The Venice Area Audubon Society will be bringing you the first program of the season via Zoom. Our presenter is

John Dunne, author of the award-winning book, “Drying Up – The Fresh Water Crisis in Florida”.

America’s wettest state is running out of water. Florida—with its swamps, lakes, extensive coastlines, and legions of life-giving springs—faces a drinking water crisis. *Drying Up* is a wake-up call and a hard look at what the future holds for those who call Florida home. Journalist and educator John Dunn untangles the many causes of the state’s freshwater problems. Drainage projects, construction, and urbanization, especially in the fragile wetlands of South Florida, have changed and shrunk natural water systems.

Dunn investigates previous and current restoration efforts as well as proposed future solutions. He challenges Floridians to rethink their relationship with water and adopt a new philosophy that compels them to protect the planet’s most precious resource. If you wish to read “Drying Up” it can be ordered from UF Press here:

Order Book

Enter the code WATER and receive a 25% discount and free shipping through October 2021.

Purple Marten House Dedication

Mill Lake Park in Ornge City
Monday, November 8th at 11:00 a.m.

Congratulations to the West Volusia Audubon Society on their 60th anniversary! To celebrate, we will have the dedication of an 18-room Purple Martin House, which will be stationed on the southeastern shore at Mill Lake Park in Orange City, at 207 E. Blue Springs Avenue. Mill Lake is a natural lake. In the 19th c., a portion of it was the site of one of Volusia County's first sawmills, but it fell into years of neglect. In 2013, thanks to an ECHO Grant, the lake was refurbished and cleaned up and turned into a beautiful park highlighting its natural qualities.



Join us, along with Orange City's Mayor and City Council, at the park on Monday November 8th, at 11am. Mayor Gary Blair will read a proclamation in honor of the West Volusia Audubon Society's 60 years of stewardship and enjoyment of the natural world. Afterwards, Eli Shapiro will host a birding walk around the lake.

Purple Martins are in the Swallow family of birds. They eat while in flight and migrate in colonies in early January-

March. Their diet is insects which are abundant near water. They are cavity nesters and will use Martin "apartments" due to a lack of large trees.



Hangin' with the Ovenbird

**Peter May, Professor of Biology,
Stetson University**

Not long after Cindy and I moved to our new house in the woods a few years ago, we had a fire pit and patio installed in our backyard, and while the paver guys were here I had them build a small sitting patio in the hammock at the edge of our lot. A big laurel oak came down in the hammock not long before we built here, creating a lovely treefall gap in the mesic hammock, fringed by several beautyberry bushes with big fruit crops. I photographed male and female Black-throated Blue Warblers feeding on those beautyberries the fall before we had the paver work done. It seemed like an ideal spot for a patio designed for birding, which we dubbed the Birdio.



THE BIRDIO

I've spent countless hours in the Birdio in the last year, lounging in a comfortable chaise while scanning the canopy overhead, the understory and the forest floor for birds and other

critters moving through. Sitting in one spot looking up at the canopy for a couple of hours at a time has taught me how frequent some canopy-dwelling migrants that I used to consider uncommon or rare actually are. This includes Scarlet Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and all of the spot-breasted thrushes expected here (Veery, Swainson's, Gray-cheeked/Bicknells, Wood and Hermit), which have all appeared in or around the Birdio at some point in the fall or winter.

The thrushes and tanagers are attracted in the fall by the ubiquitous camphor trees that, fortunately and unfortunately, populate our sinkhole hammock. The presence of camphors (*Cinnamomeum camphorum*) is unfortunate because it is such an aggressively invasive non-native species, but fortunate because it produces large quantities of high-quality bird-dispersed fruits that attract many frugivorous fall migrants. I have a couple of

small feeders on the Birdio to attract the few resident species that eat seed, but most of the time when I'm out on the Birdio I'm more interested in the passage migrants than the feeder birds that for whatever reason always seem more ordinary. Most of the time.



OVENBIRD

On September 18 I saw a small brown bird walking methodically in my direction, turning over leaf litter and quartering the forest floor as he leisurely made his way towards the Birdio. Ovenbird! Though they are common in the hammocks here throughout fall migration (beginning as early as August) and extending into winter, I don't often

get to observe Ovenbirds doing their typical leaf-litter gleaning mode of foraging. They can be rather shy birds, and getting close to a foraging Ovenbird without alarming it is something I've rarely been able to do. But this one was coming to me.

I first fell in love with Ovenbirds when I was cutting my teeth birding in northern Virginia many decades ago. There they are common breeders in mature deciduous forest, and I learned to find and identify them by their *teacher teacher teacher* song that is so iconic of mixed mesophytic forest. Ovenbirds and Wood Thrushes singing in a mature oak-hickory-beech forest in May make my heart flutter. But I didn't actually see Ovenbirds all that often in Virginia, common as they were.

It wasn't until I moved to Florida, and particularly when I started spending a lot of time in the oak scrub of Ocala National Forest, that I began to learn to find and see Ovenbirds regularly enough to photograph them with some frequency. Challenging birds to photograph, to say the least. While in migration or wintering here, Ovenbirds are pretty easily found by their distinctive alarm call, which they will break into at the slightest provocation. *Chewk chewk chewk*. Simply driving slowly through the scrub of Ocala will trigger Ovenbirds that are within 10-20 meters of the road. Once I learned that call, the abundance of Ovenbirds during migration became obvious to me.

It took me more than 20 years of photographing birds before I got my first satisfactory image of an Ovenbird, but once I learned more about their habits and behavior photographing them became incomparably easier. The

advent of digital helped tremendously as well. Trying to photograph any woodland bird on the shaded forest floor with film rated at ISO 100 or 160 is nearly impossible without the use of artificial light. The availability of useable digital ISO's of 5000 or more is a total game-changer when it comes to photographing birds in low-light habitats.

But back to my Birdio Ovenbird – not only did he forage calmly in the leaf litter while I photographed him, but he also eventually came on to the Birdio and began eating – wait for it – seeds! I had no idea. Ovenbirds feed primarily on animal prey like insects and invertebrates, I thought, perhaps supplementing those with fruit occasionally as many warblers do in the fall. I've had a couple of warbler species eating seeds at a feeder sporadically in winter (Yellow-rumped, Pine, Yellow-throated), but I don't think of seeds as typical warbler food. As it turns out, a study on wintering Ovenbirds in Jamaica found that their diet there consisted of 19% seeds (and the rest animal prey, mostly ants). So my little guy was just doing what Ovenbirds everywhere do during the fall and winter.

But it gets better. Ovenbirds defend territories not only during the breeding season, but during the winter as well. They return to the same little patch of habitat repeatedly, from which they exclude other Ovenbirds. Both males and females defend territories during winter. By the way, though I've been calling my Birdio Ovenbird "he" there is no way to determine sex of Ovenbirds visually. Unlike most warblers, they are sexually monomorphic. My Birdio Ovenbird has been returning to feed on seeds for over three weeks. Yesterday (October 9) was the last day I saw him. Every time I spend more than a half-hour or so on the Birdio he returns. My territory is his territory. What a treat. Maybe I'll get really lucky and he will decide to spend the winter with me. I'd like that.

All the wonderful Ovenbird photos that Peter May shared with us can be viewed on the West Volusia Audubon Facebook page.

[**Ovenbird on WVAS Facebook Page**](#)

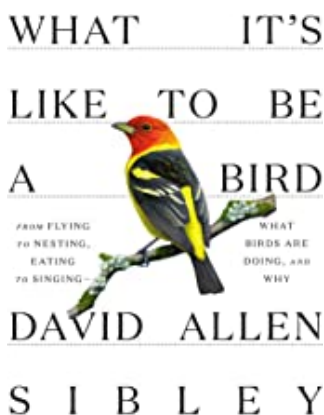


The Book Nest

by Martha Rogers

David Sibley is the author and illustrator of a series of bestselling guides to birds and nature. His latest book entitled *What It's Like*

To Be A Bird: From Flying To Nesting, Eating To Singing, What Birds Are Doing And Why explores bird anatomy and behavior. Common species of birds from the United States and Canada are featured in a format of short essays with many illustrations. A browsable book that has something for anyone who likes birds.



To read reviews click on the link provided. Check your local library system for available copies.

What It's Like To Be A Bird



Fall in Lyonia preserve

by Michael O'Shea

It's that time of the year again when days become shorter, leaves begin to change color, and cooler weather is on the horizon. Birds and other animals begin to harvest the plump ripe berries that adorn the vines as well as the tips of tree branches. The Winged Sumac (*Rhus copallinum*) is one such plant



WINGED SUMAC BERRIES



WINGED SUMAC

that signals the start of Fall. Its leaves change from



CAROLINA HOLLY



VIRGINIA CREEPER

green to a vibrant red. They also have sprays of berries that droop down inviting wildlife to consume the fruit. The Carolina Holly (*Ilex ambigua*), which is deciduous, is also full of berries these days. Another plant that has begun to change color is the Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*). It's a vine whose leaves are green and then change to a red hue. Further into the preserve one might notice



YELLOW BUTTONS

Yellow Buttons (*Balduina angustifolia*). A member of the Aster family, it dots the landscape with bright yellow flowers. Once the flower petals drop it leaves a yellow ball at the end that looks like yellow buttons.

When it comes to Fall blooming flowers, the star of the show would have to be the



GARBERIA

the show would have to be the Garberia (*Garberia heterophylla*). It is just now sending up flower buds. When in bloom it covers the preserve in a blanket of purple. A beautiful flower, it resembles an upside-down paint brush.

Certainly, a magnet for all kinds of pollinators such as bees and butterflies.



FLORIDA SCRUB-JAY



FLORIDA SCRUB-JAY

But plants are not the only things busy in the preserve. The Florida Scrub-Jay, which is an endemic bird that is only found here in Florida, has begun to harvest acorns from the oak trees. They will then take these acorns and find a spot on the open sandy soil to bury or stash them for the winter. Feeding mostly off of things like insects and worms in the Summer, they gather up acorns for the wintertime. This becomes their main food source during the winter when other sources are not so readily available.

It's a great time to be out in the preserve. What better way to enjoy nature as it transitions from the hot summer months into the cooler and more colorful months of Fall.

The End
