



Audubon | FLORIDA

Naturalist

Winter 2025

The sunflower bloom at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary.
Photo: Renée Wilson/Audubon Florida



Julie Wraithmell, Executive Director

Few natural phenomena are more stunning than the explosion of color (and pollinators) with the Southeastern sunflower bloom in the fall. The flowers at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, pictured on the cover, proved to be especially spectacular this year. They are a vivid reminder that the work we do to conserve and restore the Sunshine State's wetlands creates vital habitat

and improves the quality of life for both wildlife and people. We have seen major steps forward in Everglades restoration again this year, culminating in a flurry of ribbon cuttings, project completion celebrations, and critical planning initiatives (page 10). We hope to carry this momentum into the New Year, especially as Wood Storks and Roseate Spoonbills begin their nesting season (page 3). We know you'll be right there with us—make sure you're signed on to our email list using the QR code below so you can stay at the cutting edge of Florida conservation news.

Julie Wraithmell, *Executive Director*,
Audubon Florida



Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

Photo: Joseph Przybyla/Audubon Photography Awards



Carol Timmis, Chair

We loved seeing everyone at October's Audubon Assembly in Howey-in-the-Hills. We were joined by 25 new Conservation Leadership Initiative students, Senate President Kathleen Passidomo, Representative Lindsay Cross, Miccosukee Tribe of Indians Chairman Talbert Cypress, dedicated volunteers and chapter leaders, as well as nearly 260 other friends. We flocked together to go birding,

learn new approaches to conservation and advocacy, and return to our neighbors and communities with renewed inspiration.

We've taken that energy into our preparations for the upcoming Florida Legislative Session (page 9). We're also preparing new and exciting exhibits at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary (page 5) and re-opening the Center for Birds of Prey for visitors (page 12). We hope to see you soon at one of these amazing gateways to the natural world.

Carol Colman Timmis, *Chair*,
Audubon Florida

2025 Florida Audubon Society Leadership

Executive Director

Julie Wraithmell

Board of Directors

Chair

Carol Timmis

Vice-Chair

Mary Jean Yon

Treasurer

Brian Miller

Secretary

Lida Rodriguez-Taseff

Kathleen Carr

Marsha Cox

Bren Curtis

Paul Ferber

Jason Fischer

Mary Keith

Lois Kelley

Amy Koch

Paul Loftus

Trent Maddox

Ron Magill

Charlie Margiotta

Brian Miller

Steve Nellis

John Nelson

Lida Rodriguez-Taseff

Lauren Sher

Carol Timmis

David Walker

Mary Jean Yon

Emeritus

Joe Ambrozny

Sandy Batchelor

John Flanigan

Steve Lynch

Heidi McCree

Michael Sheridan

Roseate Spoonbill Nesting Season Kicks Off in Florida Bay

The Everglades Science Center (ESC) has a busy season ahead as staff prepare to monitor nesting Roseate Spoonbills across Florida Bay. ESC was established in the Florida Keys in 1939 by the National Audubon Society's first director of research, Robert Porter Allen. Allen began a full-time study of Roseate Spoonbills, living among them in a tent for weeks at a time. Although many scientists historically studied birds' eating habits by killing them and examining their stomach contents, the spoonbill was so scarce that Allen had to find another way. His research changed how scientists studied birds and left a legacy of more than 85 years of data investigating the spoonbill and its habitat.

This season, the team is led by Wading Bird Research Specialist Shauna Sayers, with assistance from Research Associate Kaycee Doherty, Contractor Suzy Roebling, and Seasonal Research Assistants Michelle Carranza and Allie Mallouk. The team plans to monitor 63 keys within Florida Bay, with sites scheduled for visitation once per season, three times per season, monthly, or weekly, depending on bird nesting activity and historic trends. At the nesting sites, researchers will climb into the mangroves to determine whether Roseate Spoonbills are nesting there and place tags on nests. They have special permits and permissions to conduct these studies using visual data from mirrors and cameras.

The goal? To monitor individual nests through each step of the breeding process, from nest building to egg incubation to fledging. The Roseate Spoonbill is a critical indicator species for Florida Bay and the Everglades. Nesting success or failure points to Everglades restoration impacts and/or the ongoing impacts of a changing climate.

Seasonal Research Associates Allie Mallouk (left) and Michelle Carranza (right) prepare for a field day in the Everglades.



Roseate Spoonbills.
Photo: Jonathan Hoiles/
Audubon Photography Awards

Wading Bird Research Associate Kaycee Doherty surveys for Roseate Spoonbills to track their nesting cycle in the Florida Bay.





Close-up of part of the living shoreline, which is colonized by oysters and other organisms.
Photo: Sydney Walsh/Audubon

Living Shorelines Make Nesting Easier for Coastal Birds in Tampa Bay

A year ago, Audubon Florida's Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries (FCIS) team completed four breakwater projects across the Tampa Bay region. These breakwaters protect the shorelines of mangrove islands that wading birds, such as Reddish Egrets and Wood Storks, as well as ground-nesting American Oystercatchers, rely on to raise their families. The breakwaters were designed to be populated by oysters, creating a "living shoreline," which provides a food source for birds, protection from wave action, and natural water filtration.

Oysters and barnacles are already recruiting onto the breakwaters in good densities. Staff have noted visible differences in the amount of wave action: only smaller waves make it through the breakwaters, reducing erosion along the islands' edges. Oyster colonies should continue to grow across these sites into the future—providing both food for wildlife and improving surrounding water quality. Looking back to an older living shoreline project at the Alafia Banks Critical Wildlife Area, the future success of these sites looks bright.

SPOTLIGHT: ALAFIA BANKS

Each year, thousands of wading birds of 17 different species nest here, making it one of the largest wading bird colonies on Florida's Gulf Coast. In 2019, almost a mile of breakwater structures was installed at the Alafia Banks, leased from and managed in collaboration with The Mosaic Company and Port Tampa Bay. Six years later, oysters cover much of the breakwater with massive oyster mats connecting many of the individual structures together. There are even mangroves springing up from the oyster mats within the breakwater! On the shoreline, young mangroves have re-established themselves in areas where mature mangroves had been toppled by wave action and erosion, thereby making the island more resilient to sea level rise. Additionally, the living shorelines minimized damage from Hurricanes Helene and Milton in 2024, protecting much of the coast and vegetation across the Alafia Banks and the birds that rely on this habitat.

New Inspiration, New Partnerships

SETTING THE STAGE

An abundance of excitement is brewing at Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary as the first phase of our Capital Campaign campus transformation comes to fruition. You may have already seen our new navigational signage for the parking lot, new campus entrance, and boardwalk. Interactive and engaging exhibits for the new Spurlino Foundation Discovery Center will be unveiled in February immersing visitors of all ages in the cultural and natural history of the swamp. With mounted artifacts to feel, bird calls and other sounds to hear, and an opportunity to dress up like a burn boss, this multi-sensory learning experience is the perfect complement to a visit to our iconic boardwalk.



Join us in realizing an exciting vision and future for Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary. Learn more at audubon.org/corkscrew/vision



Photos: Renée Wilson and Yafit Rokach/Audubon Florida

COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

This fall, Audubon hosted two groups of management and front-of-house staff from The Ritz-Carlton Naples, Tiburón, for guided tours on the boardwalk. True to their brand of “luxury in nature,” the team recommends and arranges visits to Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary for their guests, and we enjoy sharing the importance of this special place with the team. Highlights from their tours included walking through the sunflower meadow, seeing a Limpkin up close, and hearing an alligator bellowing. We look forward to seeing more of the team and their clientele on the boardwalk in the coming season.

Swamp-seekers, rejoice: From Dec. 16 through April 30, the Sanctuary is open daily at 8 a.m. with the last admission at 3 p.m. Get tickets online: [Audubon.org/corkscrew/visit](https://audubon.org/corkscrew/visit)

A Year of Surprises and Firsts for Beach-Nesting Bird Species

Beach-nesting birds benefited from a combination of storm effects and had a banner nesting year in 2025. Multiple hurricanes and large storms in 2024 rearranged habitat across the Gulf Coast. The storm surge and winds tore out vegetation, leaving large expanses of bare sand, perfect for nesting. While some communities are still rebuilding, both birds and people were spared major impacts in the 2025 season. A lack of hurricanes this year meant birds nesting in the newly exposed areas could successfully fledge without contending with excessive waves, wind, or water, showcasing how resilient they can be without human disturbance and development.



Royal Terns. Photo: Walker Golder/Audubon

NORTHEAST FLORIDA

This year, our team saw encouraging results for many coastal bird species, thanks in large part to the dedication of our incredible shorebird steward staff and volunteers. Their tireless work to protect nesting areas and educate beachgoers resulted in strong

nesting activity and impressive chick numbers at many sites. While predation incidents continued at above-normal levels, overall productivity improved, and with continued management, we expect even greater success in the years ahead.

Amelia Island State Park supported more than 150 Least Tern nests with solid fledging success. **Huguenot Memorial Park** again hosted thriving colonies of Brown Pelicans, Laughing Gulls, and Royal Terns, with almost 2,000 Royal Tern chicks flooding the beach at one point.

Anastasia State Park supported exceptionally high nesting numbers and strong results, including the best Black Skimmer season in decades with more than 30 fledged young, as well as outstanding Wilson's Plover productivity. **Fort Matanzas** saw Least Terns return in good numbers after several years of low activity, with promising success despite some losses to predation. At **Summer Haven**, new sand deposits created ideal nesting

conditions and supported large Least Tern colonies with moderate success. Along the **Tolomato River**, American Oystercatchers and Wilson's Plovers again nested in healthy numbers, though several sites were affected by rising sea levels and associated tidal overwash.



Wilson's Plover. Photo: Jamey Binnevel

PANHANDLE

Tyndall Air Force Base had an incredible year with 39 Wilson's Plovers fledging (a record) as well as 16 Snowy Plovers. The Eastern Panhandle also represented a high point for American Oystercatchers; Audubon staff were delighted to see seven chicks

at the **St. George Island Causeway** and the first oystercatcher chick at **Lanark Reef** since 2021. **Cape San Blas** also fledged a Snowy Plover chick for the first time since 2017.

In the Western Panhandle, Audubon applauds the community members who spotted nesting colonies at construction sites. One construction site in **Navarre Beach** had an incredible year and produced more than 500 Least Tern fledglings and 45 Black Skimmer chicks. For the first time in several years, Destin supported a large colony on **Norriego Point**, fledging more than 100 Least Terns. Overall, the Western Panhandle fledged more than 630 Least Terns, 45 Black Skimmers, and two Wilson's Plovers, with an additional 17 Least Tern fledges from monitored rooftops.

FLORIDA COASTAL ISLANDS SANCTUARIES

After a difficult year in 2024, the nesting sites within the Tampa region's Florida Coastal Islands Sanctuaries bounced back in 2025. Overall, the Audubon team recorded 7,000 pairs of nesting seabirds, with record numbers of Royal Terns, Sandwich Terns, and Caspian Terns at **3D Island**. American Oystercatchers took advantage of new nesting habitat created by the 2024 hurricanes at 3D Island, and 11 chicks fledged across all sites. We also celebrated the return of 96 nesting Wood Stork pairs to **Dot Dash Dit Critical Wildlife Area**, with a total of more than 925 Wood Stork pairs across all sites in the region.

TAMPA REGION

Reduced vegetation and open sandy beach conditions resulting from the 2024 storms encouraged Least Terns to explore new areas of beach as well as successful nesting by many Wilson's Plover pairs. We also recorded Black Skimmers laying eggs on **St. Pete Beach** on April 26—the earliest ever for skimmers in Pinellas County! Across Pinellas and Sarasota counties, Black Skimmers fledged more than 670 chicks.

Thanks to predation management and partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), **Fort De Soto Park** had a record year for Wilson's Plovers, producing 14 fledges. **Three Rooker Island** continued to be a critical nesting site for American Oystercatchers, Black Skimmers, and Laughing Gulls, as well as Royal, Caspian, and Sandwich Terns: several thousand birds fledged from this single island.

Banding American Oystercatchers with FWC this year will tell us critical information about their movement and behavior.
Photo: Kara Durda /Audubon Florida



Least Terns. Photo: Luisa Rua



Audubon also monitored 56 **rooftops**, 17 of which were active this year across Pasco, Pinellas, Hillsborough, and Sarasota counties. We recorded 11 American Oystercatcher pairs with at least six fledged chicks, two Black Skimmer colonies, six Least Tern colonies, and three Killdeer pairs.



**UNITED STATES
POSTAL SERVICE®**

One of our Least Tern rooftops was active for the first time since

2019 on a historic USPS building. We coordinated with the post office to conduct regular chick-checks (USPS staff even helped out), and we returned four chicks to the roof after falls—thank you, USPS!

A huge thank you to our 43 rooftop program volunteers who dedicated 172 hours to monitor sites, check on chicks, and enter important nesting data.

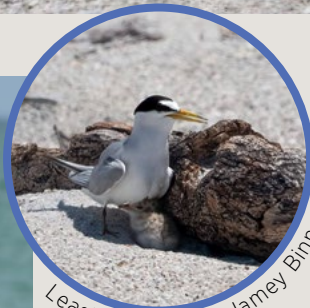


American Oystercatchers. Photo: Jamey Binneveld



SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

More than 400 Black Skimmers and at least 480 Least Terns fledged from sites up and down the coast. It was a great year for Wilson's Plovers, with fledges from **Second Chance Critical Wildlife Area, Keewaydin Island, Morgan Island, Dickman's Shoals, Bonita Beach, Fort Myers Beach, and Cayo Costa**. It also proved to be a year of firsts for this area: the first-ever recorded instances of Royal Tern and American Oystercatcher nesting in Collier County, the first successful Least Tern colony on **Sanibel Causeway** since the 1990s, and the first Least Tern colony at **Bonita Beach** in ten years. We look forward to seeing these birds returning next nesting season.



Least Tern. Photo: Jamey Binneveld

Audubon Looks at Local, State, and Federal Solutions to Find Conservation Wins

The end of the year is a natural moment to take stock: What progress have we made? What more can we do for the places we love? For those looking to improve quality of habitat for birds and quality of life for our communities, Audubon has updates and opportunities at the federal, state, and local levels.

FEDERAL

With the federal government experiencing so much transition, it can be difficult to decide where to start or how to make the biggest impact for conservation in your community.

At our recent Assembly, Senior Director of Policy Beth Alvi framed the different roles we can take in these dynamic times.



Senior Director of Policy Beth Alvi and Everglades Policy Associate Caitlin Newcamp at the Florida Capitol.
Photo: Erika Zambello/Audubon Florida

Role: Memory-Keeper

Ensuring that lessons, practices, and the impacts of change aren't forgotten—documenting today's challenges while carrying forward proven conservation strategies.

Example:

Land and habitat management: Documenting the effects of lapses in prescribed fire, sustainable forest management, and invasive species control—showing what is lost when management stalls and preserving proven methods so they can be reactivated without starting from scratch.

Role: Pacesetter

Leading by example—stepping in when federal capacity changes, modeling effective practices, and showing what is possible.

Examples:

Pioneering recovery efforts for the **Florida Grasshopper Sparrow**—nest monitoring, predator management, and release of captive-reared birds—demonstrates that targeted, science-driven intervention can pull a species back from the brink.

Preparing similar early interventions for the **Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow**, before population declines becomes irreversible.

Role: Convener

Building coalitions by bringing diverse voices together—expanding the conservation tent for stronger impact.



Example:

Collaborating with NOAA and the National Estuarine Research Reserves on coastal resilience, sea-level rise, flooding, and water quality challenges across Florida.

FIVE TIPS FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY

1 Understand the Landscape

Learn how your local government works, including who decides what, how agendas move, and when public input is allowed. Know which existing rules already protect your local environment.

2 Engage Decision Makers

Build relationships early and show up consistently. Audubon members are encouraged to serve on local boards so your chapter becomes a trusted voice in key decisions.

3 Mobilize Your Community

Bring people together. Broad coalitions and trusted experts strengthen your case, especially when you connect the issue to shared community values.

4 Use Smart Advocacy Tactics

Support your position with credible information and practical alternatives. Simple, solution-focused messages make it easier for officials to act.

5 Plan and Persist

Plan for the long game. Stay engaged before, during, and after decisions. Celebrate small wins to keep volunteers energized for the work ahead.

STATE AND LOCAL

Often the biggest opportunities to improve our landscape come at the state or local level. The Florida Legislative Session runs from January 13 through March 13, 2026, and committees have begun hearing bills. Many of the most consequential opportunities for conservation are emerging at this level.



Momentum is building around a bill filed by Florida Representative Kim Kendall (R-18).

After the public pushed back hard against last year's attempted Guana River Wildlife Management Area land swap, it became clear that Floridians expect better.

HB 441 would require transparency, accountability, and meaningful public notice when proposals affect conservation lands. Importantly, Audubon is advocating that the bill makes the state present the ecological and financial justification for major land-use decisions—not just rely on claims from applicants.

We are grateful for this effort and look forward to working with the sponsors as the bill moves forward.



Audubon warned last year that SB 180 would weaken local control of growth management—and those concerns have proven justified.

This session, Audubon is engaged in efforts to fix the harmful provisions of SB 180. The bill blocks counties and cities from strengthening their land-use plans retroactively, voiding any “more burdensome” improvements to land-use plans and ordinances adopted after August 1, 2024. This effectively creates a statewide freeze on improving land-use standard through October 1, 2027 due to the past hurricane disaster declarations in 2024.

SB 180 also adds new one-year freeze after every future hurricane for any community within 100 miles of each side of a storm's track—that's a 200 mile wide swath likely to cover much of the state.

If these restrictions only applied to damaged homes and businesses needing reconstruction that might be understandable. However, they apply to all new developments that were never impacted by a hurricane.



Everglades restoration remains a race against time—to repair historic damage and to defend South Florida against rising seas and stronger storms. We have been fortunate that Everglades restoration has seen sustained funding for several years.

Beyond the Everglades, statewide conservation programs are feeling strain. Last year's funding for Florida Forever was disappointingly low, and the program's resources are dwindling. While we applaud strong investments in the Rural and Family Lands Protection Program, Florida Forever is the tool that protects many of Florida's most iconic landscapes—like the 21,600-acre addition to Goethe State Forest approved in November.

Everglades Restoration
by the Numbers

How do we know Everglades restoration is flowing? We see the progress ourselves!

Oct. 21, 2025

LAKE HICPOCHEE PHASE II

Located near the headwaters of the Caloosahatchee River, Lake Hicpochee plays a vital role in regional water management. The project, part of the Northern Everglades and Estuaries Protection Program, aims to improve water quality, reduce the frequency and volume of harmful discharges to the Caloosahatchee Estuary, and provide much-needed shallow water storage in the surrounding watershed. Once complete, the restoration will help capture and treat stormwater runoff, promote natural wetland function, and enhance habitat for fish and wildlife.

Jul. 15, 2025

RIBBON CUTTING FOR THE GRAND OPENING OF C-43 RESERVOIR

This 10,000-acre reservoir will improve water quality, protect coastal ecosystems, and expand Florida's water storage capacity.



C-43 Reservoir. Photo: SFWMD



Lake Hicpochee. Photo: SFWMD

Restoration is nearly complete for Picayune Strand, restoring water flows to 70,000 acres.
Photo: Erika Zambello/
Audubon Florida



Nov. 6, 2025

GROUNDBREAKING FOR THE EVERGLADES AGRICULTURAL AREA INFLOW PUMP STATION

The EAA Reservoir, located south of Lake Okeechobee, will store 78 billion gallons of water and deliver up to 470 billion gallons of clean water annually to the Everglades and Florida Bay. It also supports the Biscayne Aquifer, the primary source of drinking water for South Florida.



EAA pump station

groundbreaking. Photo: SFWMD

Sept. 12, 2025

GROUNDBREAKING FOR CEPP

The Blue Shanty Flowway will help re-establish natural sheet flow in the southern Everglades by removing obstacles and enhancing water movement. This will enable clean water to flow south to the areas that need it most. Working in tandem with the Everglades

Agricultural Area Reservoir, the project will support the delivery of vital fresh water to the ecosystems of Everglades National Park and Florida Bay.



Blue Shanty Flowway groundbreaking. Photo: Everglades Foundation



Photo: McKee Gray/Audubon Florida

DONE: RIBBON CUTTING FOR BISCAYNE BAY COASTAL WETLANDS

The BBCW project aims to rehydrate coastal wetlands while reducing harmful runoff into Biscayne Bay and Biscayne National Park. According to the Army Corps of Engineers, the project “will restore wetland and estuarine habitats, and divert an average of 59 percent of the annual coastal structure discharge into freshwater and saltwater wetlands instead of direct discharges to Biscayne Bay and the national park.”

UP NEXT: PICAYUNE STRAND

As the first Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Program project to begin construction, the Picayune Strand Restoration Project will restore water flows to a portion of Collier County in Southwest Florida.

When complete, the project aims to:

- Restore flows to nearly 70,000 acres of wetlands and uplands in the Picayune Strand as well as nearby public lands such as the Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve and the Collier-Seminole State Park.
- Restore the natural water flow to the Ten Thousand Islands National Wildlife Refuge and Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.
- Recharge the aquifer.
- Reduce overdrainage.
- Improve salinity balances in tens of thousands of acres of coastal estuaries.
- Improve fire management and habitat for threatened species.

Center for Birds of Prey Owl Aviary Nearly Ready to Re-open

Thanks to the generosity of many donors, a new owl aviary is taking shape in Maitland! While we have been closed to the public, contractors were hard at work, and we are excited to see the progress so far. A concrete slab was poured to create a sturdy base, and wooden beams are coming together to resemble an aviary. Next, ponds built in each section will enable the owls to stay cool and hydrated throughout the hot Central Florida summer. There are even covered viewing areas so guests can stay cool, too. Native plants and updated signage will cap off this historic refresh. We anticipate a grand opening in February, and we cannot wait for the community to see the beautiful new space.



Our owls look forward to moving into their new homes around the end of the year, and we are in the home stretch of raising funds to complete the aviary. To get us over the fundraising finish line, all gifts through the end of 2025 are being matched up to **\$100,000**. Can you help us? Visit: act.audubon.org/a/owlaviary



▲ In this November photo, the future aviary is prepped for the concrete slab to be poured.

800th Bald Eagle Released from Center for Birds of Prey

On November 21, a team from the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey released the 800th rehabilitated Bald Eagle into the wild since the Center opened in 1979. Florida House Representative Jennifer Canady (District 50) attended the release on private property in Sorrento, located in Lake County.

The eagle, patient #2025-701, arrived at the Raptor Trauma Clinic from Seminole County on October 11, having sustained injuries in a territory fight with another eagle: soft tissue wounds on the left wing, abrasions on the feet, and bruising on the chest. The bird also tested positive for lead poisoning, a common cause of illness in Bald Eagles and other raptors that occurs when the bird is exposed to lead-contaminated wastewater or eats the carcass of an animal shot with lead bullets.

So far this year, the Center for Birds of Prey has released 30 Bald Eagles back to the wild. The milestone 800th Bald Eagle comes less than three years after the Center celebrated its 700th Bald Eagle release in January 2023.



Representative Jennifer Canady and Center Director Katie Warner release the 800th Bald Eagle. Photo: Tim Barker

“Eagles are symbols of resilience and recovery. To be able to release the 800th rehabilitated Bald Eagle into the wild is a significant conservation achievement. Like people, these birds depend on places with clean water and healthy ecosystems to call home. Audubon, through conservation actions, advocacy, rehabilitation, and education, protects the places these birds need.”
— Katie Warner, Director of the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey

Six Florida Chapters Honored with Conservation Awards

With 44 chapters statewide, Audubon Florida uses its annual Assembly event as an opportunity to shine a light on standout projects, recognize remarkable leadership, and celebrate what's possible when chapter members put their passion into action. Each year, chapter leaders are invited to nominate their own chapters or others for awards recognizing excellence in education programs, conservation projects, and overall chapter achievement. Awards are presented in two categories: one for smaller chapters (under 500 members) and one for larger chapters (over 500 members).

"These awards remind us that conservation is not just about birds—it's about people coming together to make a difference, one project, one partnership, one volunteer hour at a time," says Chapters Conservation Manager Kristen Kosik. "Every chapter represented here tonight contributes to that bigger story."

Audubon congratulates all honorees, with thanks for the work they do to protect birds and the places they need across the Sunshine State.

This year brought in a remarkable range of nominations—representing creative approaches, deep partnerships, and meaningful local impact across Florida.

Announced in front of a packed house during the Audubon Assembly on October 18, the 2025 award recipients included representatives from six chapters: (back row, left to right) Hernando Audubon's Tom St. Clair, Orange Audubon's Deborah Green, (Kristen Kosik, Audubon Florida), Hernando Audubon's Joe Murphy. (Front row, left to right): Duval Audubon's Elizabeth Filippelli, Citrus County Audubon's Molly Gurien, Southeastern Volusia Audubon's Marsha Cox, and Santa Fe Audubon's Celina Rohman, with Julie Wraithmell, Audubon Florida executive director. Photo: Abby McKay/Audubon Florida



Best Education Program, Small Chapter: Citrus County Audubon Society

Through their **Nature Journaling Program with Public Schools**, chapter volunteers taught middle school students how to keep a nature journal—combining art, science, and observation to build curiosity and connection with the natural world. Working with a Title I school serving diverse students in a low-income community, they helped students practice noticing, questioning, and recording details about local plants, sparking a sense of wonder that can grow into a lifelong conservation ethic. The project even expanded into a bird walk and is now inspiring teachers to bring nature into their classrooms year after year.

Best Education Program, Large Chapter: Orange Audubon Society

More than 500 students and nearly 30 adults participated this year in the **Orange Audubon Society Schoolyard Christmas Bird Count** to observe, record, and count birds right in their schoolyards. Thanks to Orange Audubon Society members, students gained confidence as young community scientists, learned to use binoculars, and contributed to real scientific data, all while developing a deeper connection to nature.

Best Conservation Program, Small Chapter: It's a Tie!

Santa Fe Audubon Society has advanced their **Southeastern American Kestrel Nest Box Project**, using easy-to-access pole systems and ultra-light tags to monitor fledging success and dispersal patterns, while engaging students, volunteers, and partner organizations. The team worked to balance the scientific data collection with volunteer and community engagement.

Southeastern Volusia Audubon Society installed a **Motus Tracking Station**, joining a collaborative wildlife tracking network that monitors migratory birds, providing real-time data on timing, routes, and habitat use. By establishing a station in New Smyrna Beach, the chapter filled a gap in Florida's East Coast network, engaged the community through a Birdathon fundraiser, and partnered with multiple organizations to advance conservation science.



Great Blue Heron.
Photo: Marti Phillips/Audubon Photography Awards

Best Conservation Program, Large Chapter: Duval Audubon

Duval Audubon led Jacksonville's first-ever **Lights Out Proclamation**. This milestone is the result of more than three years of awareness-building, education, and collaboration to reduce artificial light pollution and make the city safer for migratory birds traveling along the Atlantic Flyway.

Small Chapter of the Year: Hernando Audubon Society

This chapter has truly expanded its reach and impact over the past year through creative partnerships, youth engagement, and strong community connections. From their collaboration with the Chinsegut Conservation Center to outreach and advocacy efforts, Hernando Audubon shows how even a smaller chapter can make a big difference.

Large Chapter of the Year: Orange Audubon Society

Orange Audubon Society has done remarkable work this year, from advancing their nature center project on the Lake Apopka North Shore to expanding educational and conservation programs that reach hundreds of people, including youth and underserved communities.

Audubon Florida Recognizes Conservation Leaders for 2025



Left to right: Linda Sitek, Senior Officer Dennis Palmer, Rep. Lindsay Cross, and Dan Larremore.

Audubon Florida presented its annual statewide awards to seven conservation leaders at its annual Assembly event on October 16-18, 2025. Since 1999, Audubon Florida has gathered its staff, members, partners, and other stakeholders for a celebration of the year's accomplishments, a look ahead at coming priorities, and a recognition of the leaders making a difference for Florida's natural resources.

Theodore Roosevelt Award: Senate President Kathleen Passidomo

This recognition is given annually to a decisionmaker demonstrating leadership, resolve, and courage on behalf of Florida's environment. During her legislative tenure, Senator Kathleen Passidomo (R-Naples) has been a champion for wetlands protection, smart growth management, conservation lands, and Florida's award-winning state parks, among many other critical conservation priorities. She has also been an unparalleled advocate for Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, working to ensure that this unique ecosystem continues to thrive for generations to come.

"Throughout her legislative career, Senator Passidomo has shown that conservation and good governance go hand in hand," said Audubon Florida's Senior Director of Policy Beth Alvi. "Her enduring legacy will be the special places she has protected and defended for future generations."



Senate President Kathleen Passidomo (center) with Senior Director of Policy Beth Alvi (left) and Executive Director Julie Wraithmell.

Philanthropist of the Year Award: Winter Park Servant-Leader Linda Sitek

This recognition is given to an individual or organization in appreciation of their catalytic philanthropy, elevating Audubon's work in Florida. Winter Park philanthropist Linda Sitek has been a dedicated supporter of Audubon and the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland since rescuing a trio of young Barred Owls with her husband, after they fell from their nest. The owlets were rushed to Audubon's Center for Birds of Prey where they were rehabilitated and ultimately returned successfully to their home nest. Sitek's parents instilled in her a humanitarian ethic and value for servant leadership at an early age.

"Linda's service on the Center for Birds of Prey advisory board has been invaluable," said Center for Birds of Prey Director Katie Gill-Warner. "She is a connector, broadening Audubon's wingspan in Central Florida and introducing our work to new audiences."



Center for Birds of Prey Director Katie Warner (left) with Linda Sitek.

Guy Bradley Award: Tampa-area State Park Biologist Daniel Larremore

This award recognizes an individual for stewardship of imperiled species in the face of threats to birds and their habitats and is named for Florida's first wildlife warden, Audubon's Guy Bradley, who was killed in 1905 while

enforcing new protections for imperiled wading birds. Florida State Park Biologist Daniel Larremore was recognized this year for a career dedicated to the protection of Florida's shorebirds, seabirds and their habitats at state parks in the Tampa Bay region. For twenty years, Larremore's work at Tampa Bay's Honeymoon Island State Park, Caladesi Island State Park, Three Rooker Bar, and more have safeguarded the nesting and wintering habitat of some of the hemisphere's rarest and declining coastal birds. He was an essential partner in the development of public-private partnership efforts to employ volunteer bird stewards to protect the birds from recreational disturbance, a model that has since been replicated around the country.

"These park beaches are some of the most critical in the state for rare species like Least Terns, Black Skimmers, American Oystercatchers, and more," said Kara Durda, Audubon's Tampa Bay shorebird program manager. "His hard work and creativity on behalf of Florida's natural resources have literally resulted in the successful nesting of tens of thousands of shorebirds and seabirds, and the protection of one of Florida's most iconic landscapes."

Champion of the Everglades: The Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida

This award is given for leadership on behalf of the Everglades and its iconic wildlife. This year, Audubon proudly recognized the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida for their partnership in the conservation of the Everglades' Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow. The sparrow's population has dwindled due to habitat loss and is now further endangered by sea level rise. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, the Miccosukee Tribe, Audubon, and conservation partners joined forces to secure state resources and advocate for a federal appropriations request to launch a conservation breeding program, modeled after the successful, ongoing effort to recover the Florida Grasshopper Sparrow. Chairman Talbert Cypress accepted the award on behalf of the Tribe.

"The Tribe's leadership and commitment have been essential to advancing conservation strategies that honor both ecological restoration and cultural resilience," said Julie Wraithmell, executive director of Audubon Florida, "ensuring that this rare bird and the Everglades ecosystem it depends upon have a chance to recover and thrive for generations to come."

Florida's Special Places Award: State Representative Lindsay Cross

This annual award is presented to an individual who has made a difference for the landscapes and habitats that make Florida special. This year, Audubon honored State Representative Lindsay Cross (D-St. Petersburg) for her vision, persistence, and unwavering commitment to safeguarding the wetlands, coasts, and wild places that make Florida so special. A scientist by training and an advocate at heart, Representative Cross has spent her career working to protect Florida's lands and waters—from her years leading coastal and watershed programs in Tampa Bay to her strong environmental leadership in the Florida Legislature.

"Representative Cross consistently brings both conservation expertise and empathy to her work in the Legislature, building bridges between communities, science, and policy to speak for Florida's environment," said Audubon Florida's Senior Director of Policy Beth Alvi.



From left to right: Audubon Florida Director of Bird Conservation Audrey DeRose-Wilson, Dan Larremore, Tampa Bay Shorebird Program Manager Kara Durda, and Executive Director Julie Wraithmell.



Senior Director of Policy Beth Alvi with Chairman Talbert Cypress.



From left to right: Audubon Florida Senior Policy Director Beth Alvi, Rep. Lindsay Cross, and Executive Director Julie Wraithmell.

Audubon Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award: FWC Senior Officer Dennis Palmer

Audubon's Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award is given to an officer who sets an example of protecting Florida's imperiled wildlife that is more than a job, but a moral obligation. This year's honoree was Senior Officer Dennis Palmer of the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission, who regularly patrols Bay County's Tyndall Critical Wildlife Area, a breeding area for five species of imperiled beach nesting birds. Because the birds and their nests are camouflaged, beachgoers often ignore signage and unwittingly get too close, causing the death of eggs and helpless chicks. Palmer has been instrumental to the success of Tyndall's nesting birds and an invaluable partner to the biologists who work on site. For several years, he spent his holiday weekends, both Memorial and Independence days, patrolling the area to keep both the public and wildlife safe, all the while coordinating with biologists.

"Senior Officer Palmer cares deeply about this special place and its wildlife, and his engagement with the public is often the difference between life and death for these rare and declining species," said Col Lauzau, Audubon's Panhandle shorebird program manager. "He goes the extra mile every time for wildlife and is a credit to his agency and the people of Florida."

Audubon Volunteer of the Year Award: Central Florida's Robert Veal

This award recognizes one of Audubon's more than 1,500 volunteers in Florida, who support essential community science programs, habitat protection, and restoration projects, and the important work of Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and Audubon's Center for Birds of Prey. This year's award recognized Robert Veal, who since 2006 has donated more than 15,000 volunteer hours to the Audubon Center for Birds of Prey in Maitland. Veal first joined the flock as an EagleWatcher, watching a nest near his house. He then visited the Center and decided he wanted to be a part of the Center team. Robert started as a cleaner outdoors, but has held many volunteer positions at the Center, including as a clinic assistant, docent, volunteer electrician, volunteer trainer, eagle wrangler, and more. He can be reliably found at the Center several days a week and is always happy to help out with whatever job is needed: He cuts up food for patients, scrubs poop, wraps injured wings, replaces lightbulbs, and talks to guests.

"One of the most special things about Robert is the friendship he had with Francis, an ambassador Bald Eagle," said Center for Birds of Prey Director Katie Gill-Warner. "As an imprinted eagle in his 30s, Francis didn't like many people; however, he was best friends with Veal for nearly 20 years."



From left to right: Audubon Florida Panhandle Shorebird Program Manager Col Lauzau, Senior Officer Palmer, Director of Bird Conservation Audrey DeRose-Wilson, and Executive Director Julie Wraithmell.



Robert Veal (left) with Audubon Center for Birds of Prey Director Katie Warner and Audubon Florida Executive Director Julie Wraithmell.

With a theme of "Power of Birds, Power of Us: Science and Joy as Catalysts for Conservation," Audubon Florida's 2025 Assembly was attended by more than 250 conservationists and community advocates from around the state. Find more information about Audubon's critical conservation work at audubon.org/florida

Photos: Renée Wilson/Audubon Florida



Save the Date!

2026 Audubon Assembly

We are excited to announce our
2026 Audubon Florida Assembly
dates and location.

OCTOBER 15-17, 2026
St. Pete Beach, FL

We hope you flock with us!

Photo: Abby McKay

Save Taxes and Birds! Double Your Impact in 2025

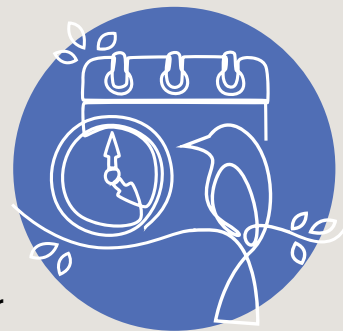
If you are 70½ or older, you can make a tax-free distribution from your **traditional or Roth IRA** to Audubon Florida.

Here's how it works: you donate up to \$100,000 without incurring income tax on your withdrawal. The process is simple: you direct distributions from the amount of your choosing from your traditional or Roth IRA to Audubon Florida. This can be a one-time or recurring gift. The distributions go directly to Audubon Florida and are not subject to federal income tax.

When making your gift, to ensure it is properly processed and that you are listed as the donor of

record, please have all checks directed to the address below and contact Suzanne Bartlett at 305.371.6399, ext. 123 or Suzanne.Bartlett@audubon.org to let us know to expect your gift.

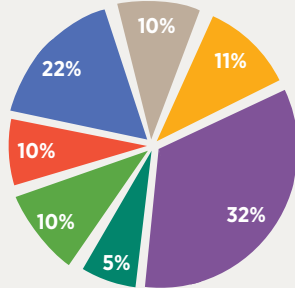
**National Audubon Society
Office of Gift Planning
225 Varick Street, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10014**



AUDUBON FLORIDA & FLORIDA AUDUBON SOCIETY FINANCIALS JULY 1, 2024 – JUNE 30, 2025

AUDUBON FLORIDA EXPENSES BY PROGRAM

**TOTAL
EXPENSE**
\$11,859,217



\$575,797 Florida Operations Program

\$1,153,454 Public Policy

\$3,870,690 Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary

\$1,273,665 Everglades Conservation

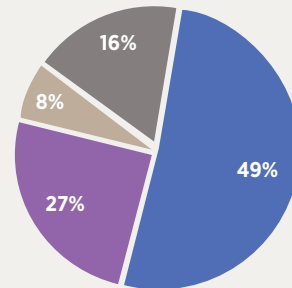
\$1,146,615 Everglades Science

\$1,168,122 Center for Birds of Prey

\$2,670,874 Coastal Stewardship

AUDUBON FLORIDA REVENUE SOURCES

**TOTAL
REVENUE**
\$11,859,217



\$5,806,784 Contributions & Bequests

\$3,178,680 Government Grants

\$928,097 Investments

\$1,945,656 Center Admissions & Other Revenue

FLORIDA AUDUBON SOCIETY, INC. STATEMENT OF ASSETS, LIABILITIES, & NET ASSETS AS OF JUNE 30, 2025

ASSETS

Current Assets

Cash	\$45,531
Cash - <i>Restricted</i>	\$20,062
Charles Schwab Investment	\$10,335,405
Charles Schwab Investment - <i>Restricted Geanagel</i>	\$1,435,696
Charles Schwab Investment - <i>Restricted VonBoroski</i>	\$458,798

Total Current Assets \$12,295,493

Other Assets

Land	\$3,089,731
Building & Improvements	\$2,352,823
Furniture & Equipment	\$31,408
Accumulated Depreciation	-\$1,830,786

Total Other Assets \$3,643,175

TOTAL ASSETS \$15,938,668

LIABILITIES & EQUITY

Net Assets

Land-Preservation	\$503,612
Unrestricted Net Assets	\$9,481,800
Temporarily Restricted Net Assets	\$1,594,494
Permanent Restricted Net Assets	\$300,000
Net Income	\$4,058,762

Total Net Assets \$15,938,668

**TOTAL LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS
\$15,938,668**

Royal Terns.
Photo: Walker Golder/
Audubon



999 Ponce de Leon, Coral Gables, FL, 33134

Tel: 305-371-6399 | audubon.org/florida

Executive Director: Julie Wraithmell

Production: Target Print & Mail | **Editor:** Erika Zambello

Associate Editors: Renée Wilson, Karina Jiménez

Designer: Frances Roy Agency | **Contributors:** Beth Alvi, Karina Jiménez, Chris Farrell, Kristen Kosik, Jeff Liechty, Caitlin Newcamp, Carol Timmis, Katie Gill-Warner, Aaron White, Renée Wilson, Julie Wraithmell, Erika Zambello

The Naturalist is published by Audubon Florida. No portion of this publication may be reproduced without written permission from Audubon Florida © 2025. The Florida Audubon Society, National Audubon Society (doing business as Audubon Florida), and the 44 chapters in Florida, work together in a strategic alliance.

Thank you so much to our 2025 Audubon Florida Assembly sponsors!



FERBER

Rayonier



LYKES
BROS. INC.



Vulcan Materials

Holbrook Birding Expeditions

Kitson & Partners / Babcock Ranch

RiverGlades Family Offices

We protect birds and the places they need.

Audubon works throughout the state using science, advocacy, education, and on-the-ground conservation.

DONATE

Audubon's efforts depend on you. Learn more about giving by contacting Sarah Sauerland at sarah.sauerland@audubon.org

FOLLOW US

@AudubonFlorida

@AudubonFL

@Audubon_FL

STAY IN TOUCH

audubon.org/florida/advocate



Wilson's Plover.
Photo: Zach Matchinski/
Audubon Florida