

THE Skimmer

March 2023



SOUTHEAST VOLUSIA AUDUBON SOCIETY (SEVAS) NEWSLETTER | PUBLISHED OCT-APRIL

Audubon Florida Concerned with Proposed Delisting of the Wood Stork

Species expands population range as Interior Department celebrates 50 years of Endangered Species Act

The USFWS is proposing to remove the Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*) from the Endangered Species Act protection. Wood storks are the only species of stork breeding in the United States.

Audubon Florida's Executive Director, Julie Wraithmell says, "While we celebrate many delistings, we have grave concerns for the future of the Wood Stork, especially if it is left without the protections afforded under the Endangered Species Act." ... read more online at [Audubon Florida](#).

New Book Portrays Florida's Land Conservation History

Forces of Nature: A History of Florida Land Conservation by Clay Henderson

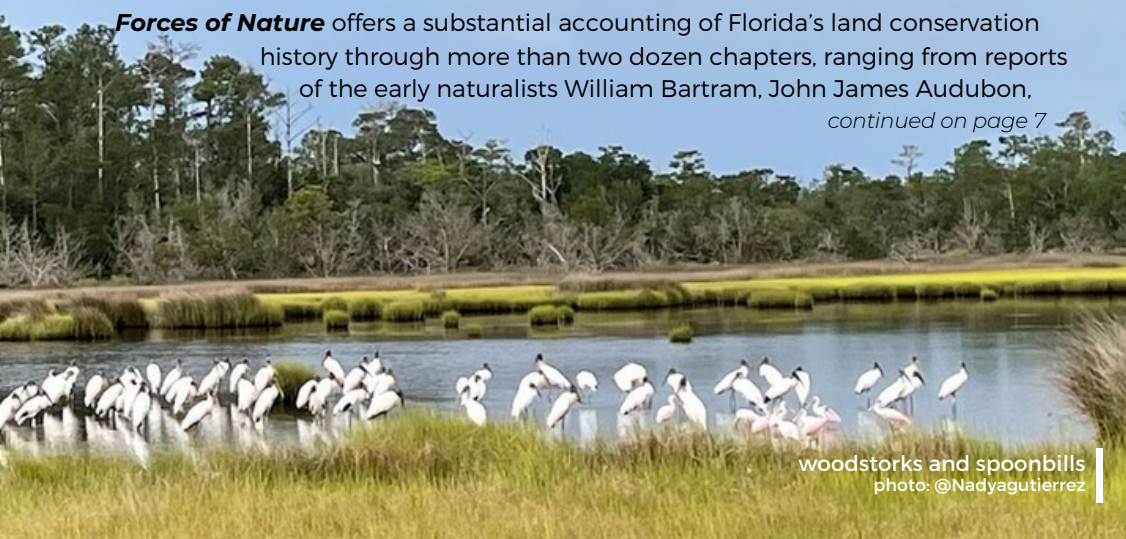
Review by Robert Merideth robertmerideth@msn.com

Former Audubon Florida president and CEO Clay Henderson talked recently about his new book, **Forces of Nature: A History of Florida Land Conservation**, at a gathering in New Smyrna Beach sponsored by the Atlantic Center for the Arts.

Henderson narrated a history that has yielded a good deal of protection for Florida's land, water, and wildlife, especially when compared to that in other states. He described how such an outcome arose despite continual forces inflicting damage and destruction, and cautioned why we need to build on this legacy and protect even more critical areas.

Forces of Nature offers a substantial accounting of Florida's land conservation history through more than two dozen chapters, ranging from reports of the early naturalists William Bartram, John James Audubon,

continued on page 7



woodstorks and spoonbills
photo: @Nadyagutierrez

No Monthly Meeting!

In lieu of our regular SEVAS meeting, we encourage our members to experience the special performance at the New Smyrna Museum of History:

"Audubon's Epic Travels in Florida, 1831-32"

See page 5 for more!

*"I hear it's hot in Florida.
And it's raining here
tonight. But the sun's gonna
shine tomorrow.
And I'm gonna do alright."*

ELTON JOHN

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Our mission: Protecting birds and their habitats through Education, Advocacy, and Action.

The Southeast Volusia Audubon Society (SEVAS) was started in the early 1970s as the New Smyrna Beach Audubon Society by a group of neighbors who were interested in protecting the local birds and wildlife around Smyrna Dunes Park. We are now one of three Audubon Florida chapters in Volusia County, each with its own identity and focus.

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PRESIDENTS' POST

Big as in big bird lists? No.
 Big as in a "Big Year"?? No.
 Big as in birds that are Big? No.

Time to think big!

BIG as in our planet, well at least as it pertains to our beach, our shore birds and our seabirds. And let's think even bigger, how about our Florida water?

These concerns are under legislative threat. About two weeks ago you should have received the environmental alert from us regarding the Volusia County Council preparing to review their policy regarding allowing dogs on ALL the County beaches. As we understand it the issue became an agenda item when one Council person thought it a reasonable request.

Unfortunately that meeting to address dogs on the beach did not feel like it went our way. Dog folks were out in force with their stated position being "this is what we want", while the other side presented stronger evidence of their opposition (birds, turtles, dunes, dog waste, etc). The council asked their staff to research the possibility of a trial beach in Ormond with the potential to add other areas if shown to be workable. According to the Daytona News Journal report, the Council Chair, Jeff Brower, said he wanted this to happen. Sad but true. It's not too late to write to the Council members. Stay tuned and stay involved!

On another front there is the proposed "Right to Clean Water" amendment to the Florida Constitution. Such an amendment would create a fundamental right to clean and healthy waters. Did you know that 80% of Florida's springs are polluted? Polluted water was a major factor in the deaths of over 1000 manatees in 2021. As of 2018, 2440 (over half) of Florida's water bodies assessed by the state were declared "impaired".

Enough is enough! Let's pull up our boots and get this amendment on the ballot in November. We need signatures, signatures and more signatures. Almost one million Florida resident signatures are required to get it on the ballot in November. We can help with this. We are asking each of you to get 10 petitions signed and get at least one of those 10 to get 10 more signed.

This is doable.

Contact us for a copy of the petition to be reproduced and/or contact FloridaRightToCleanWater.org or email admin@floridarighttocleanwater.org for more information about how you can help.

Yes, it's time to think BIG!

Our Conservation Committee is hoping to identify ways we can be active, with the help of Audubon Florida, in areas of concern for our local environment.

Let's get out there and see what we can do!

Bill & Marsha Cox
president.sevas@gmail.com



Belted kingfisher
 photo: susan dayer

Signs of Nature

How shall we live?

Once upon a time, when women were birds,
there was the simple understanding
that to sing at dawn and to sing at dusk was to
heal the world through joy.
The birds still remember what
we have forgotten,
that the world is meant to be celebrated.

Terry Tempest Williams

March is here and Spring is in the air.

Here in the Northern Hemisphere, the Vernal Equinox or official beginning of Spring is 5:24pm on March 20. For many, this is their favorite time of year. What then should we do to celebrate?

The first Red-winged Blackbirds have arrived at our feeder in New Smyrna Beach. I'm hoping they are on their way to Morrisville, Vermont, where their raucous song in the swampy areas is a "true" sign of Spring, along with iconic pussy willows.

Do you have memories of birdsong that remind you of Spring? Author Terry Tempest Williams often reflects on the environment and here asks; "How shall we live?" Birds are marvelous creatures that can tell us much about our world and even ourselves.

The Bird Diva of Vermont, Bridget Butler, would encourage us to find a favorite spot in nature, sit a spell, observe and use these three prompts to encourage our observations:

I notice I wonder ... It reminds me of ...

And remember that the bird's song means, "the world is meant to be celebrated."

If anyone cares to share, we can put your thoughts in the next newsletter. (president.sevas@gmail.com)



Red-winged blackbird
photo: lwolfartist

SEVAS in the Field

Stay up to date!

Check our [Facebook](#) and [MeetUp](#) pages for changes, additional events, or cancellations.

TUESDAY MORNING BIRDERS

TMB walks are essentially leaderless, but several experienced birders are always available to help. Meet at the site 8am, and plan to spend about two hours:

March 7: Riverbreeze Park, Oak Hill
March 14: Bushman Park, Port Orange
March 21: Turtle Mound, Canaveral National Seashore
March 28: Spruce Creek Park, Port Orange

BIRDS & BREWS

B&B walks are our monthly afternoon social gatherings! We bird different sites, and enjoy time afterwards to connect at a local pub or restaurant.

March 23: Dunlawton Sugar Mill Gardens, Port Orange
Kim Ramos will lead from 3:30-5pm and after birding, we'll convene at Lost Lagoon Wings & Grill on Dixie Hwy.

FIELD TRIPS

SEVAS field trips are longer outings to further areas. We usually meet locally and carpool.

Friday, March 3: Lake Apopka Wildlife Drive

Observe more American Coots and Common Gallinules than you've ever seen before, plus key species like Purple Gallinule, Gray-headed Swampphen, Fulvous Whistling-Ducks, and Black-bellied Whistling Ducks. There's often a surprise or two! Meet to carpool at 6:30am at SW corner of the Walmart lot on SR44. Bring a lunch and plan to return to NSB mid-afternoon.

Friday, March 10: Orlando Wetlands

This site is a true gem! Expect a nice array of passerines plus Purple Gallinules, Roseate Spoonbills, Whistling-Ducks, and maybe American and/or Least Bittern. A Peregrine or Snail Kite may well surprise us! Meet at 7am at the Edgewater Dunkin plaza parking lot. Bring a lunch and plan to return to NSB mid-afternoon. Significant walking may be required if trams are unavailable with a large crowd.

SPECIAL EVENT

Monday, March 6: "One Morning" Challenge

Back by popular demand, the test here is to see as many species as you can in one morning in Volusia County.

You may begin at any time after midnight, and plan to finish in time to attend the wrap up gathering at noon at the Marine Discovery Center in NSB. So get a team together, presumably two to four birders, determine your itinerary, and join us in Volusia County!

SEVAS birding events are free and open to all. Some locations require an entrance fee, but most do not.

Recent Happenings



Punkie McKinney reads *Little Owls Big Day* to kids



Richard Fasse and kids building the owl box.

“All About Owls” event a great success!

This program at the Babe James Community Center was captivating! Our program featuring Laura from the Marine Science Center and Bubba the Great horned owl.

SEVAS members presented the book to kids at the center for the day. Susan Dayer showed pictures of the owls that lived in Pelican Cove and shared about the baby owl rescue. Dorothy Cresswell sang the song that was turned into her children’s book.

The kids built an owl box with Richard Fasse that will be installed later at the center. We’ve been invited back for another event in March. Stay tuned!

Purple Martin Project Update: Patiently Waiting

Our second season has officially begun. The gourds were raised on Jan 4, at the Marine Discovery Center. We knew from the Purple Martin Conservation Association data that we should expect scouts to arrive mid-January. So far, despite playing the the Dawn Song and Daytime Chatter CDs, we’ve not had any takers.

John Kendall reported one second-year bird, not a scout, at 9:46am on Feb 14 at his home near Turtle Mound.

One is better than none, so keep your eyes out and your fingers crossed!

Lunch and Learn with the Marine Discovery Center (MDC) March 1

You know what they say- "no bugs, no birds!" We visited our Plants for Birds, P4B, garden, where SEVAS has installed bird-friendly plants adjacent to our restored salt marsh to attract birds and pollinators.



It was a chance to learn more about natives and enjoy a tour to learn which plants were used, which birds have been attracted, and why these gardens are important to the ecosystem.

MDC works with our local Audubon chapters on programs and projects to increase public awareness about the many bird species of the Indian River Lagoon and surrounding environs? Stay tuned for more!

Winter Florida Shorebird Association (FSA) Count

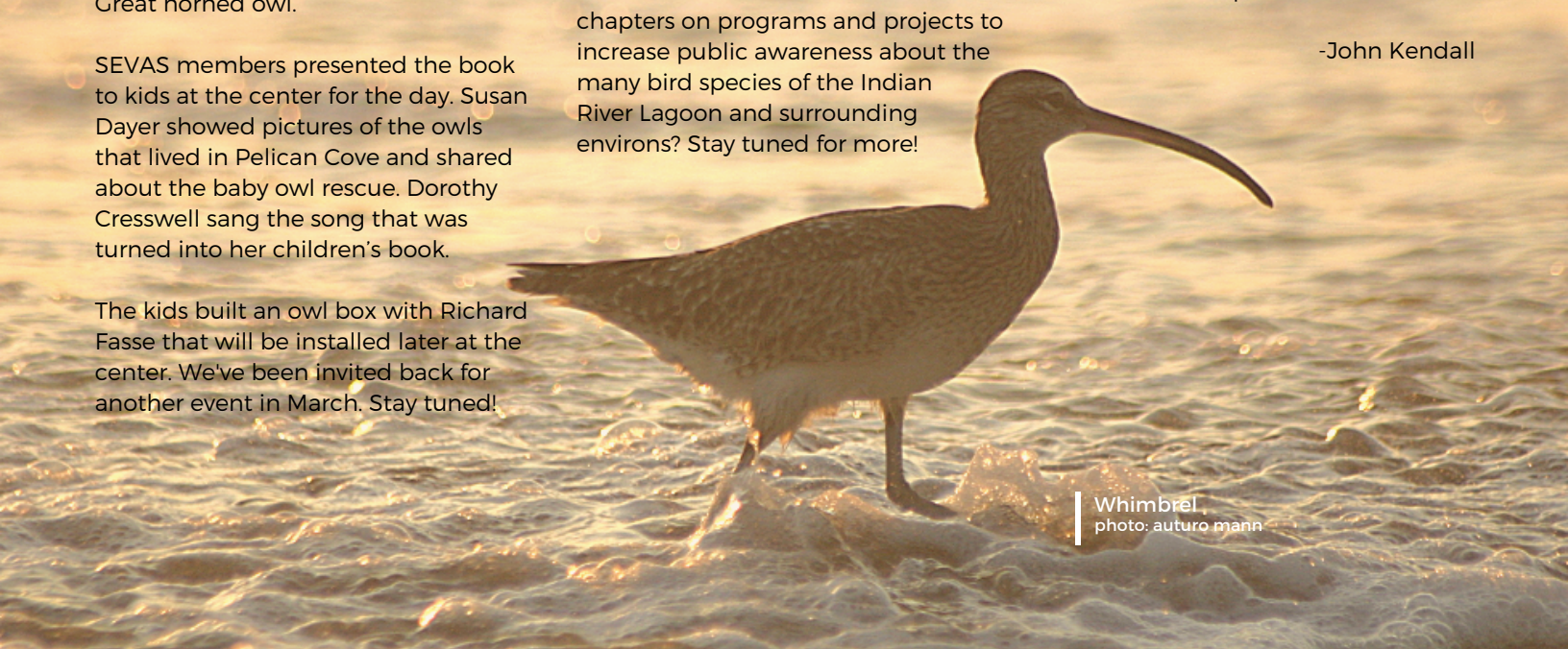
This survey is held annually in early February and involves counting shorebirds at assigned areas along the beach from Ponce inlet to Canaveral National Seashore.



Despite choosing one of the better low tide days we’ve had since Ian and Nicole, it was a slow day overall. A beautiful highlight was a group of red knots along the beach at 3rd Avenue.

It was mild with little wind, so Robert Merideth, Liz Payne Merideth and I enjoyed the day but notable misses seen regularly were Piping Plover, Semipalmated Plover and very low numbers of Black-bellied Plover. Perhaps the birds were feeding elsewhere that day? They utilize beaches as part of their winter foraging range here and we looked, alas. Perhaps the river flats held them this year as I had noticed lower water levels and exposed flats from the bridges and along Riverside Ave. We totalled with 34 species in all.

-John Kendall



Whimbrel photo: auturo mann

Upcoming Events

Marine Science Center (MDC) Discovery Boat Winter Birding Tour

Get out on the water March 15! Enjoy a trip from NSB north up the Indian River to Ponce Inlet's Disappearing Island onboard MDC's 40-passenger Discovery boat.



These popular three-hour morning trips give birding enthusiasts of all levels time to explore with small groups of experienced birders, naturalists and local Audubon members. After a short cruise, you'll disembark at Disappearing Island to walk the shoreline and search for migratory species seen here only during the winter months.

Winter Birding Tours are scheduled once a month in January, February, March and April. To book your spot, call the MDC at 386 428 4828 or click to visit the [Marine Discovery Center](#).

Marine Science Center (MSC) Raptor Exhibit Groundbreaking Ceremony

Come to Ponce Inlet and celebrate the groundbreaking of the new Raptor Education and Conservation Exhibit on **Monday, March 20 at 1pm**.



This is a great chance to see the exhibit's location and layout. MSC will also feature live bird programs and conduct a tour of the bird department.

Call 386 304 5545 or visit the [Marine Science Center](#).

SEVAS Book Club Meetings Set for Spring

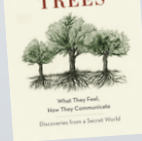
The SEVAS book club is up and running, er, flying!

Our next meeting is March 28, 3pm. The book is ***The Seed Keeper*** by Diane Wilson.



"A haunting novel spanning several generations, ***The Seed Keeper*** follows a Dakhóta family's struggle to preserve their way of life, and their sacrifices to protect what matters most"

In April, we will explore ***The Hidden Life of Trees***



by Peter Wohlleben.
and meet on April 18
at 3pm.

"In ***The Hidden Life of Trees*** Peter Wohlleben shares his deep love of the woods and forests and explains the amazing processes of life, death and regeneration he has observed in the woodland."

"After a walk through the woods with Wohlleben, you'll never look at trees the same way again".

Meetings are usually held at the Riverside Conservancy in Edgewater.

Contact Beth Chew to join:
bethchew99@gmail.com

Audubon's Epic Travels: Florida, 1831-32 Special live performance by Joe Vetter



In lieu of our General SEVAS meeting this month, we encourage our members to head over to the [New Smyrna Museum of History](#) for a live program about John James Audubon by local historian, Joe Vetter.

Thursday, March 9 Two Performances 4:30 & 7 PM

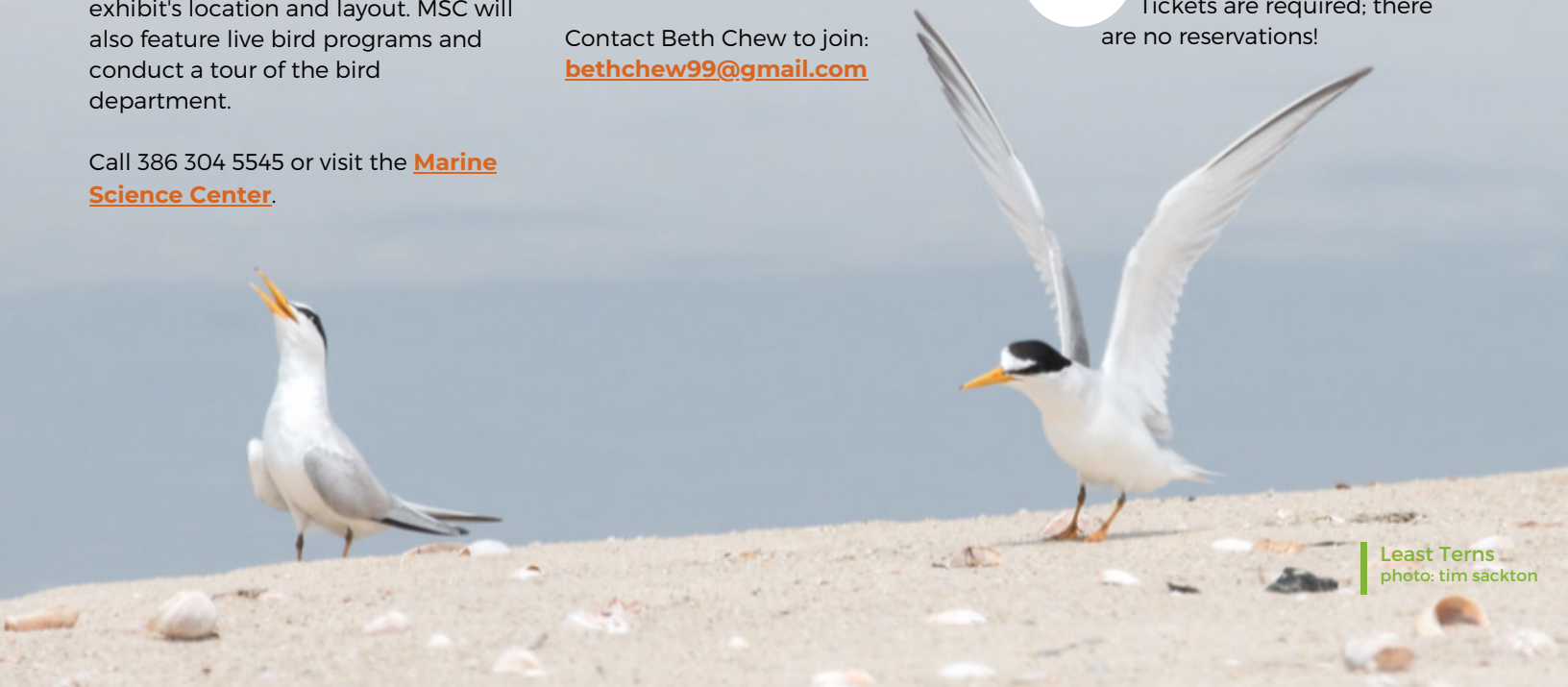
Due to a growing audience and limited seating space, two performances are being offered. Mr. Vetter will be in character with trivia prizes for this presentation!

JJA, the quintessential artist, woodsman and naturalist explored our shores to complete his monumental ***Birds of America***. From St. Augustine, to Bulow's Plantation, to the Halifax and Tomoka Rivers, Audubon continued to DeLeon Springs, the St. Johns and the Keys.



Call the Museum for more details: 386 478 0052.

Tickets are required; there are no reservations!



Least Terns
photo: tim sackton

Conservation Corner

Bob Chew bobchew99@gmail.com

Florida Right To Clean Water

If we want the State to be held accountable for over-permitting the pollution that hurts so many, that infringes on the liberties of Floridians -- and wastes our hard-earned taxes while degrading our property values and economic interests -- then we NEED to amend our constitution. Jim Durocher, East Central Regional Director of Florida Rights of Nature Network (FRONN) is helping SEVAS gather the signatures required to give voters the choice to amend the Florida Constitution to protect Florida waters. SEVAS has a table at the NSB Farmer's Market, and in addition to getting signatures there, board member and UF student Rachael Smith and friends will get signatures in Gainesville. Learn more at floridairighttocleanwater.org; sign the petition and join the cause.

Volusia Forever Land Buy OK'd

According to the *Daytona Beach News Journal* "\$3.01M was authorized by the Volusia County Commissioners to buy a nearly 130-acre property near downtown DeLand. DeLand contributed \$1.29M for a total price tag of \$4.3M. The city will own the land and the county will maintain a Conservation Easement so the land will to be used only for conservation and passive recreation. The land includes part of Moore Lake and is mostly upland with scrubby flatwoods and wetlands. The flatwoods provide a place for many rare species of plants and animals including the endemic Florida Scrub Jay."

Mosquito Lagoon Seagrass: After almost ten years of little or no seagrass growth in Mosquito Lagoon, there are areas where we are seeing the seagrass return. Seagrass is the keystone species in Mosquito Lagoon that is critical for a healthy marine ecosystem.

Smyrna Dunes Park: Ed Carlson is working with Marsha and Bill Cox to address concerns about the Smyrna Dunes Park.

Cici and Hyatt Brown Museum of Art: Cici and Hyatt Brown are donating another 400 of their paintings to the museum. The museum includes 68 works by naturalist and artist John James Audubon that depict Florida birds.

Sign up for Our Monthly Skimmer!

News cycle making you dizzy? Keep calm and subscribe to The Skimmer, our SEVAS digital newsletter!

Published Oct-Apr, you'll discover actions you can take to stand up for birds and the wild places they need.

Visit sevolusiaaudubon.org to sign up, and please share this copy with a friend!



Manatee photo: susan dayer

FLORIDA
HOME TO BEARS, TOXIC WATER
AND DEAD MANATEES.

Seen on a billboard on I-95, outside of Titusville, FL *A sad commentary for sure, but we hope the person who paid for this billboard has heard of the FloridaRightToCleanWater.org movement and supports this amendment to the Constitution.*

We CAN do something about our "toxic water"!

Logo Wear

Our Skimmer logo is on file with **Beach Embroidery & Screen!** You can take in a favorite hat (or any piece of apparel) and get it added for just \$10!



They look great, so start sporting yours!

Bonus for us - free advertising for our SEVAS chapter here and when you take it on trips out of town. If you want to show your colors in time for Bike Week then visit Kyleene and wear your hat!

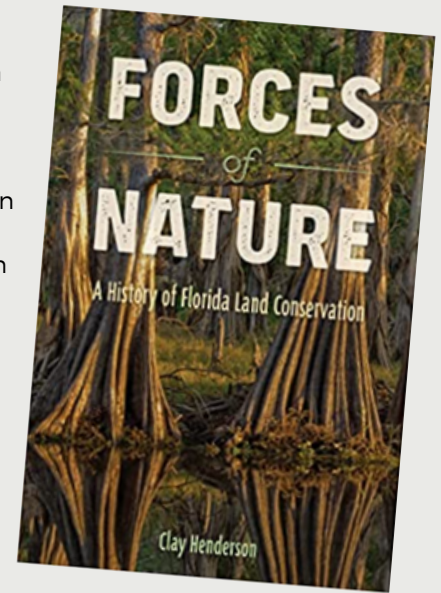
call 386 478 3931

Forces of Nature by Clay Henderson Review
(from page 1)

and others, through present-day institutional developments, such as constitutional amendments, ballot initiatives, and comprehensive land purchase programs. That's a lot to cover and the book does it in nearly 450 pages, including an appendix, notes, bibliography, and index.

The way I've approached this tome is to select chapters to read by interest rather than by order. For example, I jumped quickly to Chapter 12, "National Wildlife Refuges," which describes Merritt Island NWR and the role of ornithologist Allan Cruickshank in its creation, then to Chapter 13, "National Seashores: Art as Advocacy," which features Doris Leeper, founder of the Atlantic Center for the Arts, and her efforts to establish Canaveral National Seashore.

Henderson is a native of New Smyrna Beach. He's been an environmental lawyer, educator, and author and was elected to two terms on the Volusia County Council. Later he was executive director of the Institute for Water and Environmental Resilience at Stetson University in DeLand. He also worked in private practice for many years supporting land conservation acquisitions and developing policy tools.



What I like about **Forces of Nature** is that it draws both on Henderson's insights from his "lived experience" as a land conservationist and on his skills as a legal scholar. In that sense, the book is a creation of a seasoned practitioner and a knowledgeable researcher, synthesizing details from an assembly of primary and secondary published materials, interviews, and other sources. Appropriately, the book is published by the University Press of Florida.



photo: liz payne

Clay Henderson at NSB book signing

One overarching storyline I take from the book is that in the face of significant and constant efforts to clear, drain, pave, develop, and otherwise destroy the natural landscapes of Florida, there have been significant countering forces—a combination of passionate and persuasive citizen actions, colorful personalities, scientific evidence, political deal making, and sometimes fate, or the "luck of the cards" (apparently there was a poker game many years ago in which the winning hand also was a big win for Florida land conservation).

The gist of Florida's land conservation history seems to be one of good news, bad news. Florida has the highest percentage of protected land of any state east of the 100th Meridian (more than 30 percent of Florida's land is protected by federal, state, local, or private entities). However, Henderson says that's not enough: the amount should be between 40 to 50 percent to keep pace with the unrelenting effects of climate change, population growth, invasive species, and pollutants.

Which prompts me to offer this aspiration: Read **Forces of Nature**. Let it inspire you to act. And let it help you contribute to writing the next chapter of Florida's land conservation history.

Order your copy at [UNIVERSITY PRESS OF FLORIDA](https://www.upf.edu/) or call **800.226.3822**. **SAVE 20% with SAVE20**

New Members of *The Skimmer* Team

New SEVAS members Robert Merideth and Liz Payne Merideth recently moved to New Smyrna Beach from Tucson, Ariz., where they both served on the board of Tucson Audubon.

Robert is a retired editor in chief at the University of Arizona. Beginning next month, he will contribute a monthly review column, "Birding by Book," for **The Skimmer**. Liz is a social media consultant and graphic designer. She's the new editor of **The Skimmer** and a member of the SEVAS board of directors.





Bird of the Month

Marsha Cox *president.sevas@gmail.com*

The Gift of An Unusual Visitor

"Hey Marsh, come look at this yellow bird!" That's how the adventure with our unusual visitor began. And Bill was right, it was a yellow bird, a brilliant, eye-popping yellow. And, a bird we had never seen before at our feeder.

Now to try to ID it. After many attempts, combing through Sibley's warbler section, I kept coming up with the Yellow-breasted Chat. But of course this is a bird that should not be in this area. How about Townsend's Warbler? Definitely not in this area. Kentucky Warbler? Common Yellowthroat?

Similar colors, but not similar enough. Finally we gave up and asked Don Chalfant to come over and help with the ID. Bingo ... a definite "professional" ID of a Yellow-breasted Chat! A rare Florida bird, even for Don!

The YBCH is often still described as "the largest of the wood-warblers" yet in 2017 the American Ornithological Society removed the Chat from the Warbler family and placed it in its own family, Icteridae.

According to [Cornell Lab's All About Birds](#) the Yellow-breasted Chat has "always been a mystery to taxonomists because it looks similar to a warbler but is larger, has a more varied repertoire of songs, and has other anatomical differences."

I'm not sure how this fellow got to spend time here in NSB, but we are so glad that he did. Each time he visits our feeder we get that same "rush" as the first time we saw him. The vivid yellow breast, the large black bill and the white "spectacles" make for a beautiful sight. Thank you Mother Nature for the gift of this unusual visitor.

BECOME A MEMBER TODAY

Yes! I would like to protect and conserve habitat and wildlife in Volusia County!

Annual Memberships benefit you, the birds and our shared environments.

Join here, or securely ONLINE at sevolusiaaudubon.org.

Single \$20 **Family \$25**

Complete this form, make your check out to **SEVAS**, and mail to:

Southeast Volusia Audubon Society
PO Box 46 New Smyrna Beach, FL 32170

Scan this code!



Your membership includes our digital newsletter, The Skimmer, October to April, as well as member emails with announcements and event reminders.

First Name _____ Last Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Year-round resident Snowbird Volunteer I'd like to add an additional contribution \$ _____

Got Skimmers?
Merritt Island NWR