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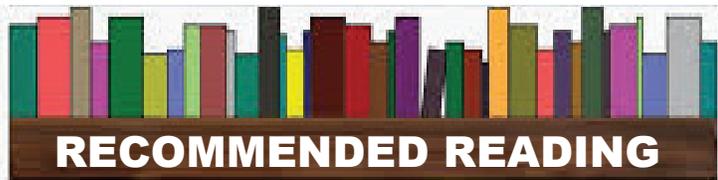


Santa Fe Audubon Society - Florida

Santa Fe Audubon Society

Melrose, FL

JULY 2022 NEWSLETTER



by Jacqueline Williamson

NATURE Activity Book For Little Ones

by Samantha Lewis



Spend some time in nature with your kids or grandkids this summer using this interactive activity book. Designed for children ages 2 to 5, the activities are easily adaptable for older kids as well. Includes fun ideas for a day in the park or your own backyard.

This book has over 100 ways to get your kids outside and engaged with the natural world.

IMPORTANT

Monday, July 25 is the deadline to register for the primaries or to postmark an application sent by mail.

You can check your status at <https://registertovoteflorida.gov>



FLORIDA WILDLIFE EXTENSION Wildlife Happenings

Click on the link below to check out the "Wildlife Happenings" in our area.

https://wec.ifas.ufl.edu/extension/wildlife_info/happenings/

THE NATIVE PLANT CONNECTION

Your yard – and the kinds of plants in it – matters to birds! As natural area for birds continue to decrease, so do native plants and the important food sources they provide for birds.



White caterpillars of the *Zebra Longwing* butterfly and orange caterpillars of the *Gulf Fritillary* butterfly feasting on *Passion Vine*.

What are native plants?

Native plants are those that occur naturally in an area. Florida is home to thousands of native plant species. Many are stunningly beautiful; some occur nowhere else in the world. Over many millennia, our native wildlife – including birds – have adapted to the resources provided by the native flora. Native plants are, in a real sense, "home" for our birds.

Pokeweed is loved by many bird species. Red-eyed Vireos feast on these berries.



Why are native plants important for birds?

In a word: insects. Virtually all land birds – 96% - require insect food for their young. Native plants support healthy populations of insects, including caterpillars, that breeding birds feed their nestlings. However, nonnative plants contain foreign compounds that most native insects won't eat. Without insects for food, baby birds starve. By adding native plants to your yard, you can help restore the imbalance created by non-native plantings and ensure the survival of future generations of birds.

To learn more about native plants in our area: <https://www.audubon.org/plantsforbirds>

Also, visit <https://www.fnps.org> Florida Native Plant Society for info and plant lists and sources.

GOOD NEWS

NEW CRITTER CORRIDOR



Photo: Zachary T Sampson, Tampa Bay Times

Crews are working on lifting a part of I-4 in Polk County to provide a crossing for wildlife under the busy highway between Orlando and Tampa. Fencing around the highway will act to herd any wildlife toward the safe underpass.

ZOMBIE GRASSHOPPER

From the "Fact Is Stranger Than Fiction Department"
by Michael Drummond



I saw this grasshopper at La Chua trail, thinking I was just getting a semi-interesting grasshopper-on-a-plant photo. I remember being grateful as it patiently posed for the photo and did not seem the least bit concerned with my presence.

Well, when I got home and pulled up the image on my computer screen for post-processing, it became obvious that the critter was well beyond being tolerant... it was dead. So, I became curious about why a dead

grasshopper would be found with its legs wrapped around the top of a *Scirpus* stem (see close-up image). Grasshoppers just do not normally "hug" stems. I then contacted the go-to grasshopper expert (Dr. John L. Capinera). Turns out that there is a species of fungus (*Entomophaga grylli*) that turns grasshoppers into zombies!

Upon infecting an unsuspecting 'hopper, the fungus causes a condition called "summit disease." Somehow, evolution has produced a grasshopper-specific fungus that, upon infection, releases certain chemicals that take control of the grasshopper's brain and induce it to climb to an elevated location (the "summit"), wrap its legs around the stem, and then die. Spores then develop inside the animal. As the dead grasshopper disintegrates, the elevated location enables fungal spores to disperse over a wider area than if the fungus matured in a grasshopper at ground level. As a result, more spores land on more grasshoppers which, in turn, results in greater reproductive success for the fungus. It's Darwin 101.

Is nature cool, or what?!!

BIRD OF THE MONTH

BLACK-BELLIED WHISTLING-DUCK

Dendrocygna autumnalis) band code "BBWD"



The Black-bellied Whistling-Duck is a boisterous duck with a brilliant pink bill and an unusual, long-legged silhouette. In places like Texas and Louisiana, watch for noisy flocks of these gaudy ducks dropping into fields to forage on seeds, or loafing on golf course ponds. Listen for them, too—these ducks really do have a whistle for their call. Common south of the U.S., Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks occur in several southern states and are expanding northward.

COOL FACTS:

The oldest recorded Black-bellied Whistling Duck was a male, and at least 10 years, 7 months when it was found in 2015 in Louisiana. It was originally banded there in 2005.

For more information about Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks visit:

[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Black-bellied Whistling-Duck/overview](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Black-bellied_Whistling-Duck/overview)

Fun Fact: A group of ducks has many collective nouns including a "brace", "flush", "padding", "raft" and "team" of ducks.