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Santa Fe Audubon Society - Florida

Santa Fe Audubon Society

Melrose, FL

JUNE 2021

NEWSLETTER

“OFF THE MAIN TRAIL”

Suggested places for creating your own field trip.

FOX PEN PRESERVE

The trailhead and parking area is located near 10777 Holden Park Road in Hawthorne, FL.



Alachua Conservation Trust (ATC), in partnership with Alachua County, purchased Fox Pen in early 2019. The preserve includes 578 acres of land in eastern Alachua County that are part of a key tract in the Lockloosa Forest project area. The preserve is also located within the Orange Creek Basin, which includes several outstanding Florida waterways.

The preserve includes a diverse mix of longleaf sandhill habitat, flatwoods, wetlands, mesic hammock, and shoreline of Moss Lee Lake. It also provides habitat for a diversity of wildlife, including gopher tortoise, Northern bobwhite quail, multiple species of reptiles and amphibians, and Florida black bear.

For additional information on Fox Pen Preserve:

www.alachuaconservationtrust.org/fox-pen-preserve-guide



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

FIREBUSH (*Hamelia patens*)



This native plant blooms for months, attracting both birds and butterflies, and is practically bullet-proof once established.

Firebush is a perennial or semi-woody shrub that is known scientifically as *Hamelia patens*. Gardeners love firebush because it produces flowers from late spring until the first frost, and the bright red flowers attract hummingbirds and butterflies, including the zebra longwing and gulf fritillary butterflies. Song birds also like to feed on the berries.

The plant's mature size will depend on where it is grown. In South Florida it may reach fifteen feet tall, though it can easily be kept to five or eight feet tall. It works well in hedges, mixed borders, or as a stand-alone shrub. In North Florida, it will die back after the first freeze but will re-grow in the spring, making it what some people call a “root-hardy perennial.”

It is also a great plant because it is heat and drought tolerant once established, can grow in a range of soils, and has no serious insect or disease problems.

For additional information on native plants for birds:

www.audubon.org/plantsforbirds

www.fnps.org/plant/hamelia-patens



Kestrel Corner

by Bill Chitty

The Kestrel nesting season is wrapping up this month. In April, we started with eight nesting pairs using the SFAS nesting boxes. Not all pairs successfully raised young to fledge, but the year was still a smashing success.



As always, watching the boxes has been very interesting. As of June 8, we had 37 eggs laid, 8 of which did not hatch. Of the 29 that hatched, it appears that 19 have fledged, and 3 are still very healthy but far too young to fly on their own. As usual, we ran into other creatures using our Kestrel boxes. Several boxes were used by Eastern Bluebirds, Eastern Screech-Owls, and Great Crested Flycatchers. We even had a pair of Piney Woods Tree Frogs in one box. Two boxes had Southern Flying Squirrels, who (by FWC guidelines) were evicted.



Eastern Screech-Owl with eggs

An exciting development is that we have collaborated with the Avian Research and Conservation Institute (ARCI) to band young Kestrels.

One of twelve nestlings that were banded.



In addition, radio telemetry devices were attached to two Kestrels just days before they fledged. These two were tracked the day after leaving the nest. Both appear to be moving around and healthy so far.



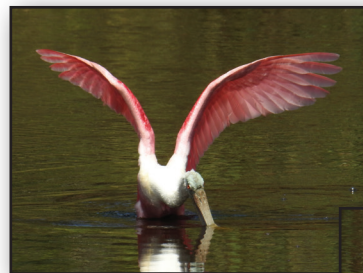
To learn more about ARCI visit their website:
www.arcinst.org

BIRD OF THE MONTH

ROSEATE SPOONBILL (*Platalea ajaja*)

band code "ROSP"

The flamboyant Roseate Spoonbill looks like it came straight out of a Dr. Seuss book with its bright pink feathers, red eye staring out from a partly bald head, and giant spoon-shaped bill.



They sweep their spoonbills through shallow fresh or salt waters snapping up crustaceans and fish.



These social birds nest and roost in trees and shrubs with other large wading birds.

COOL FACT:

Roseate Spoonbill chicks don't have a spoon-shaped bill immediately after hatching. When they are 9 days old the bill starts to flatten, by 16 days it starts to look a bit more spoonlike, and by 39 days it is nearly full size.

For more information about Roseate Spoonbills visit:
www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Roseate_Spoonbill/id

Fun Fact:

A group of Roseate Spoonbills are collectively known as a "bowl" spoonbills.