



Bay County Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 1182  
Panama City, Florida 32402

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**CURRENT OCCUPANT OR**

This newsletter is published 5 times each year: Jan., Mar., May, Sept., and Nov. -SAVE THIS ISSUE UNTIL JAN, 2016  
Our Motto is **"From Birding to the Total Environment"** Website Address: <http://www.baycountyaudubon.org>  
Bay County Audubon Society's 52<sup>nd</sup> year of continuous successful operation

**it out!!!** [baycountyaudubon.org](http://baycountyaudubon.org) or follow us on Facebook.

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**Encore!**

This group of new bird watching enthusiasts is part of Norm Capra's Education Encore class at Gulf Coast State College. Looking forward to seeing more of these wonderful people in the future!



**NEW MEMBERS FORM** (Not for renewals)

Yes, please enroll me as a new member of the National Audubon Society and of the local chapter, Bay County Audubon Society (C5ZE200Z) (Be sure to put this number on your check). Please send Audubon magazine, Conservation Chronicle, and my membership card to the address below.

\$20 One-year introductory membership  \$15 Friend (*The Conservation Chronicle* only)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make your check payable to the National Audubon Society and mail this application to the local chapter:  
Bay County Audubon Society, P.O. Box 1182, Panama City, Florida 32402

**CONSERVATION CHRONICLE**



BAY COUNTY  
AUDUBON SOCIETY

Nov - Dec 2015  
Vol . 40, Number 2

**CO-PRESIDENT'S CHAT**

*By Robin Shader*

Greetings Bay County Audubon Society members and friends. Each year we plan a wide variety of programs and events and this year we are off to a great start. Some early highlights include the successful Education Encore course at Gulf Coast State College, which attracted seven new members to our club, and our participation in the Lake Powell/Camp Helen Coastal Clean-Up. We have a fantastic film series lined up for January and of course we continue to offer interesting monthly membership programs, regular field trips and educational outreach presentations.

The Board has been very involved in planning and presenting programs but we'd really love to hear from you. Please take a few minutes to tell us what you like about our programs and what you would like to see in the future. The Board wants to offer programs that meet your needs and interests so if you have some ideas, please share. I invite you to call or email me or any member of the Board with comments or suggestions. Contact information can be found in this newsletter and on the BCAS website, <http://www.baycountyaudubon.org>.

For those of you on Facebook, please "friend" the Bay County Audubon Society page and share posts to get the word out about programs, interesting wildlife sightings and important environmental issues. We'd love to increase our membership and have a louder "voice" when we need to speak out about important issues that impact our area. Plus, it's more fun enjoying nature with friends! Your suggestions would be greatly appreciated. I look forward to reading your comments and I hope to see you at a Bay County Audubon Society event very soon.

**Christmas Bird Count – Raya Pruner**

Looking for excuses to explore the outdoors to search for birds? All birders, at any skill level, are invited to participate in and celebrate the 116<sup>th</sup> Annual Christmas Bird Count. The Bay County Christmas Bird Count will take place on Saturday, December 19, 2015. The Christmas Bird Count is an excellent outdoor activity regardless of skill level. A brief pre-count meeting will be held before the Annual Holiday Party held this year at the Science & Discovery Center on December 9<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 p.m. If you would like to participate or have questions, contact Raya Pruner or Marvin Friel at [Raya.pruner@gmail.com](mailto:Raya.pruner@gmail.com) or [marvin.bojo.friel@gmail.com](mailto:marvin.bojo.friel@gmail.com) or call 352-214-3263 and we will assign you to a birding team!! Someone from each Christmas Bird Count team will need to attend the Holiday party to pick up your team's packets and get instructions. The location for the Holiday Party is 308 Airport Road in Panama City. A post-count dinner will be hosted at the Blue Fig on the evening of the December 19<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm. Everyone is welcome to attend the dinner whether you participate in the count or not. We look forward to seeing everyone again this year and are hopeful we will have a most excellent day!

**Did You Know? – Ron Merritt**

Last year the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reported 13,668 bird/wildlife strikes to commercial and general aviation aircraft operating in the United States. Globally, wildlife strikes have killed more than 258 people and destroyed over 245 aircraft since 1988. The FAA in partnership with the USDA, maintains a database that now includes over 150,000 records of bird strikes dating back to 1990. Of these, 39% of the strikes have been identified to species and additional 12% have been identified to species group. The most frequently struck species include: doves/pigeons (14%), raptors (13%), shorebirds (8%), and waterfowl (6%). For a detailed summary report and analysis of bird and wildlife strikes to civilian aircraft visit the Bird Strike Committee - USA webpage ([www.birdstrike.org](http://www.birdstrike.org)) and click on FAA/USDA Serial Report 21 Just released!

## CALENDER OF EVENTS

### PROGRAMS

All membership meetings will be held at the Science & Discovery Center of Northwest Florida, 308 Airport Road, Panama City

**A few dates to mark in your calendars for this coming fall. Some great programs and a few important meetings that you may want to attend.**

November 9, 2015, Monthly Meeting. 7:00PM at Science and Discovery Center on Airport Road. Climate Change - Don't Shoot the Messenger by Norm Capra

December 14, 2015, Monthly Meeting. Holiday Social at Science and Discovery Center on Airport Road. Entertainment provided by the Ukulele Orchestra of St. Andrews. Please bring your favorite holiday appetizer or sweet treat to share. We will also have a White Elephant gift exchange. Please bring something that you currently own to exchange. No new items, please.

The upcoming film series is scheduled to start on January 5, 2016. Details will be provided in the next issue of the newsletter.

### BIRD IDENTIFICATION QUIZ

(Answer at the end)



Photo by Ron Houser

### Field Trips

By Ron Houser

**Saturday, Nov. 14 - Birding in the St. Joe/Cape San Blas** area with Richard Ingram  
Meet at **6:45** at the Panama City Mall by Starbuck's to leave right at **7:00**. We will stop at several sites around Port St. Joe and Cape San Blas and eat lunch in town. Bring binoculars, bug spray, snacks and something to drink. Call Richard for info: 871-1736

**Dec. 4-7 - Birding at Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Viera Wetlands and Paynes Prairie near Gainesville.** See article for information.

**Saturday, Dec. 19 - 116<sup>th</sup> Christmas Bird Count and Dinner.** Contact Raya Pruner to join a group [raya.pruner@gmail.com](mailto:raya.pruner@gmail.com) or call Ron Houser at 763-7485 or e-mail [rdhouser@knology.net](mailto:rdhouser@knology.net)

Also....

**Saturday, Nov 7.** A Monarch Butterfly tagging project will be done at the Panama City Beach Conservation Park at 10:00. This event is open to anyone who is interested in butterflies.

### Audubon Travels

Candice Harbison

From Friday, December 4 to Monday, December 7, members of our chapter will enjoy a field trip to Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge, Viera Wetlands, and Payne's Prairie State Park. The first two nights will be spent in Cocoa Beach and the third night in Micanopy, just south of Gainesville. Only Payne's Prairie requires extensive walking to see its birds, alligators, bison, wild horses, pigs, and cattle. Otherwise, the birding is mostly done from stops on the road and would be suitable for those who don't hike far. Micanopy is a charming town with non-birding options.

**If you are interested in the trip, please contact Candis Harbison at 381-7500 or [candis1@comcast.net](mailto:candis1@comcast.net) for the particulars on making reservations**

### SOLAR POWER IN FLORIDA - AN OVERVIEW OF A COMPLICATED SUBJECT By Ron Houser and John Ackerman

Solar energy has come of age. With the cost of solar power systems dropping 45% since 2010, a home or business now connects to solar once every 2.5 minutes in the U.S. Economic and environmental reasons are the primary forces driving this shift away from fossil fuels. This is happening all over the world. In fact, we are behind European and some northern Asian nations in percentage of people using solar power even though most Americans live at a lower latitude and consequently, we have more available sunlight. Unfortunately, there are some economic and political obstacles to consider before going solar.

Solar power systems for home or business are still relatively expensive but costs are dropping rapidly. Recent studies indicate the cost of installing solar panels on the average home has [plummeted 70 percent](#) since 1998, from nearly \$86,000 for a 5-kilowatt installation (the average residential solar array) to just \$26,000 in 2014. In addition, the average U.S. household uses about 10,000 kilowatt-hours (kWh) per year at a cost of around \$1,100 annually. A 5-kilowatt solar array can produce over 4,000 kWh per year, significantly cutting down reliance on the grid, your monthly electric bill, and can pay for itself in a few years (Schlanger, 2015, para. 2). In addition, with the federal Energy Investment Tax Credit (ITC) of around \$10,000, thousands of people have added solar panels to their homes and cut their utility bills substantially.

Currently, there are two main ways to acquire a solar system right now: Outright purchase, which means relatively high up-front costs, but this process allows the buyer to take advantage of the ITC, and leasing, which avoids those up-front costs but with the disadvantage of not being able to use that tax credit. Now there is a third option available in some states: a hybrid-financing plan that avoids up-front costs while still allowing tax credits. By the way, unless it is renewed, this credit will expire at the end of 2016. Solar power users still need to be connected to the grid, in most cases, to have electricity when the sun is not shining; however, many solar power users are able to sell excess power back to the power company at the same rates per kilowatt-hour during daytime hours. Yes, it is entirely possible to have a zero power bill. This is a part of "Net Metering" process you may have heard about. That is great for the customer, but not surprisingly, the power companies have a problem with it. They say that with solar customers taking advantage of the power grid, they are getting a free ride without paying anything back to cover maintenance costs and upgrading the power grid. This leads to lost revenue, they claim, and this lost revenue has to be made up by higher costs to its other customers.

### SOLAR POWER IN FLORIDA (Continued)

Since most citizens who convert to solar are in a higher income bracket, lower income citizens would possibly bear a disproportionate share of these higher costs, but not if they too could install solar panels.

With abundant sunshine, the "Sunshine State" should be a natural for solar power. However, Florida is only one of four states that does not allow citizens to buy electricity from anyone except a public utility. [Floridians for Solar Choice](#) was organized to put a constitutional amendment on the 2016 ballot to give Floridians the right to choose solar energy. This amendment would allow homeowners and businesses to avoid the up-front costs mentioned earlier by contracting with companies that provide solar systems at a low, long-term fixed rate with maintenance and upgrades when needed. Why a constitutional amendment? According to Floridians for Solar Choice, for the last three years, legislation has been introduced to allow more solar choice in Florida, but these bills did not make it out of legislative committees because of heavy lobbying by the influential fossil fuel power companies. The power companies in Florida do not want you to have the option of affordable solar power at all.

If, or when, this amendment passes, Floridians will have more power options than we have now. Surely, there can be regulations and incentives drawn up that power companies can use to get on board with solar power and resolve their objections. Power companies could get into the business of selling and servicing solar systems but they do not seem to want to help pave the way for an environmentally cleaner and more affordable future in our state. Please become informed on the subject and then make your decisions wisely when it comes time to vote for these amendments.

Schlanger, Z. (2015, July 15). Two Numbers: Solar Energy's Price Drop, Ahead of Schedule, Could Help Save the Planet. *Newsweek*. Retrieved from <http://www.newsweek.com/2015/07/24/two-numbers-let-sunshine-353848.html>

### ANSWER TO BIRD ID QUIZ

This is a marsh wren, *Cistothorus palustris*.

- Small brown bird with thin bill.
- Tail often held upright.
- Dark cap.
- Whitish eyeline.
- Bold black-and-white streaks on back. Buffy flanks, whitish chest.

These small birds will sing day and night!