

# Kite Tales

Fall 2016 Volume 8 Issue 2



## Fall Exodus!

Fall is an exciting time of year for birders and wildlife viewers. Millions of birds have finished nesting and are now heading south to their wintering grounds. Due to its geographical position many of these birds will visit Florida's wonderful wild lands to shelter, rest and refuel before continuing on their long and arduous journey. For some species Florida will be their final stop and they will spend the next three to six months living amongst and around us. The only problem for birders at this time of year is deciding where to go birding! Coastal sites will be flush with ducks and shorebirds, our forests and hammocks will be visited by colorful songbirds, and our airways will be crossed by hawks. Birds aren't the only critter that migrates at this time of year; spectacular numbers of Monarch butterflies cross the panhandle on their way to their wintering grounds in Mexico.



*Monarch butterfly by Andy Wraithmell*

In this issue of Kite Tales we highlight the White-crowned Pigeon and Birding Guru Andy Wraithmell continues his series on "How to do a Big Year." We feature "One Sky Our Birds", an international partnership that highlights how we can all help to conserve migratory songbirds.

Have a great fall, enjoying all the wonderful wildlife viewing opportunities Florida has to offer!

*—Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail and Wildlife Viewing Staff*



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## Mister Lister!

Many birders keep some sort of list...a Life, State, County, Patch, Year, Day or Yard list and some strive to add to those lists every waking hour. I keep them all and am very passionate about my yard list; I am always trying to add new species to it when I am home. This passion has provoked me to think about and implement new ways to attract more birds into my half acre backyard refuge. I have put up feeders, nest boxes, planted bird friendly trees, shrubs and plants, created brush piles and a compost heap. This has paid dividends over the years and my yard list has grown to over 125 species. My small backyard refuge is often alive with bird song and chatter and I regularly see up to 20 species a day.

For many years, birders all over Florida have been reporting exciting birds they have spotted in their backyards. A recent post on the Florida listserv about using water misters to attract birds mentioned warblers, thrushes, tanagers and hummingbirds that had been visiting the reporter's water mister. "We're getting a mister", I declared to my wife and we set off for the home improvement store. An hour later I was attaching a short plastic hose to our outdoor spigot and fitted a new brass mister to the other end. Within minutes our new bird attracter was spewing out a fine spray of water and we watched with baited breath from our dining room. It was not long before a fine male cardinal dropped in and investigated this new contraption. At first, he did not



*Blue jay at a birdbath by Andy Wraithmell*

seem that impressed but, after a few minutes he sat on the end of the mister and had a good old soak.

I started to see Northern Cardinals, Blue Jays, Tufted Titmouse and Carolina Chickadees visiting the mister on a regular basis. Moving the mister so that it lay between a young magnolia and a gardenia shrub tripled the number of birds visiting the water source! They were attracted to the wet leaves and rubbed their colorful bodies with glee as well as drinking droplets that were hanging off the leaf tips. Cerulean Warbler, Baltimore Oriole, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Pine Warbler, Gray Catbird and Yellow-breasted Chat have all visited.

I try to run the mister every chance I get, because the results are often amazing. The most

exciting moment came when a male Cooper's Hawk alighted on the birdbath and sat for a few minutes savoring the cool water on his feathers; this did not impress our songbird community though. After a few minutes there was a mixed group of approximately 20 birds squawking and fussing at the hawk! He eventually left and everyone settled back down.

I highly recommend this system for all backyard birders, it has opened our yard to so many more species that might not ordinarily visit.

For more tips on how to attract wildlife to your backyard refuge visit our [website](#).



*Shorebirds at Hagen's Cove by Andy Wraithmell*

## Birding Guru

Andy Wraithmell has been birding for over 30 years. This quarterly feature provides more tips on How to Do a Big Year by habitat and where to find White-crowned Pigeons in Florida.

What on earth is a Big Year you may ask? Basically, it's an attempt to see as many different species of birds as you can between January 1st and December 31st within a self-designated geographic location (backyard, county, state, country etc.). Sounds easy? How many different species of birds do you think you could see in a calendar year? Andy Bankert holds the Florida state big year record; in 2007 he saw 367 species! Why not challenge yourself to see as many different species in Florida during 2016? If you see more than 50 species you can apply for our NEW Big Year certificate depicting a pair of Blackburnian

Warblers. The art for this beautiful certificate was created by Rafael Galvez. Once you reach 50 species keep on adding new birds to your 2016 list. Apply during the first week of January 2017 and we will send you your Big Year certificate with your name and your 2016 total printed on it.

### **Habitat, habitat, habitat!**

Many of Florida's native species are easy to find. I am sure many of you have seen a Northern Mockingbird. These birds are generalists when it comes to picking a habitat, which is why you will find them in your backyard, at the local park, coastal hammock, in wetlands, scrub, pine forest...the list goes on. However, some birds are really picky about which habitats they frequent. For example the Florida Scrub-Jay can only be found in scrub habitats and Mangrove Cuckoos are only found in mangroves. In the last issue of

Kite Tales we featured pine forest and hardwood hammocks. In this issue we will focus on tidal flats and tropical hardwood hammocks.

### **Tidal Flats**

While tidal flats, or mud flats, lack vegetation and are home mostly to invertebrates that live under the surface, they provide very valuable habitat for creatures living in the mud, including microorganisms, worms, crabs, sand fleas, and many others. These species provide food for coastal birds, fish, and mammals. Commercially important species like clams and shrimp can be found near tidal flats, particularly along the Gulf Coast.

### **Year-round Residents**

Brown Pelican, Wood Stork, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Tricolored Heron, Reddish Egret, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Roseate Spoonbill,

Osprey, American Oystercatcher, Laughing Gull, Royal Tern, and Black Skimmer.

### Summer breeding residents

Black-necked Stilt, and Least Tern.

### Spring and fall migrants

Peregrine Falcon, Merlin, American Avocet, Black-bellied Plover, Semipalmated Plover, Greater Yellowlegs, Willet, Whimbrel, Marbled Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Red Knot, Stilt Sandpiper, Dunlin, Least Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Western Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Long-billed Dowitcher, Gull-billed Tern, Caspian Tern, Black Tern and Common Tern.

## Recommended Trail Sites - Tidal Flats

### Panhandle

Bald Point State Park and St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge.

### West

Big Bend Wildlife Management Area: Hagen's Cove, and Fort De Soto Park.

### East

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge: Biolab Road, and Huguenot Memorial Park.

### South

Everglades National Park: Flamingo area, and Tigertail Beach on Marco Island.

### Winter residents

Peregrine Falcon, Merlin, American Avocet, Black-bellied Plover, Semipalmated Plover, Greater Yellowlegs, Willet, Marbled Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Red Knot, Dunlin, Least Sandpiper, Western Sandpiper, , Short-billed Dowitcher, Long-billed Dowitcher, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, and Forster's Tern.

## Tropical Hardwood Hammocks

This habitat occurs only in south Florida and are characterized by trees and shrubs on the northern edge of a range that extends southward into the Caribbean. These communities are rare along coastal uplands south of a line from about Vero Beach on the Atlantic coast to Sarasota on the Gulf coast. This cold-intolerant tropical community has very high plant species diversity, sometimes containing over 35 species of tropical trees and about 65 species of shrubs. Characteristic

tropical plants include strangler fig, gumbo-limbo, ironwood, and poisonwood. Live oak and cabbage palm are also sometimes found within this community. Extremely rare plants, like lignum vitae, mahogany, thatch palms, and manchineel, may also be found in these hammocks in the Florida Keys. Birds abound in this habitat, including the Mangrove Cuckoo and the White-crowned Pigeon. Rare visitors from nearby Caribbean islands are often found in this habitat particularly between Miami and Key West. Species such as Western Spindalis, Bahama Mockingbird and La Sagra's Flycatcher are found annually. Other rarities such as Key West Quail-Dove, Zenaida Dove and Cuban Vireo have been recorded recently.

### Year round residents

Common Ground-dove, White-crowned Pigeon, Mangrove Cuckoo (difficult to see in winter months), Red-bellied Woodpecker, Blue Jay, Northern Mockingbird,



Red-bellied Woodpecker by Andy Wraithmell

Prairie Warbler, and Northern Cardinal.

### Summer breeding resident

White-crowned Pigeon, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Mangrove Cuckoo, Black-whiskered Vireo, and Gray Kingbird.

### Spring and fall migration

Many species of songbird migrants visit this habitat on their way north and south. More than 30 species of wood-warbler are recorded annually in this habitat.

### Winter resident

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Eastern Phoebe, Great Crested Flycatcher, White-eyed Vireo, Blue-headed Vireo, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Gray Catbird, Ovenbird, Black-and-white Warbler, Swainson's Warbler (rare), Northern Parula, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Palm Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Prairie Warbler and Painted Bunting.



*Juvenile White-crowned Pigeon at Crane Point by Andy Wraithmell*

## White-crowned Pigeon

I first saw this spectacular bird while eating breakfast in Key West. It was perched in a buttonwood tree and remained motionless for more than 30 minutes, hiding in the shadow cast by the canopy. A morning or evening walk around the streets of Key West in the spring and summer will be rewarded with multiple sightings of this iconic South Florida bird. They can often be seen perched on overhead wires or in the tops of trees. Be sure to check carefully as there are many feral black pigeons in the area as well. Look for White-crowned Pigeons at several birding trail sites in the Florida Keys. Fort Zachary Taylor State Park and Key West Botanical Gardens are two reliable sites to see them. Just recently I was at the botanical gardens and enjoyed great views of a pair of pigeons flying around and then perched in the top of a buttonwood. In

the fall, I have encountered them feeding on the fruit in poisonwood trees at Long Key State Park and Crane Point Museum and Nature Center, which is in Marathon.

During the Florida Keys Birding and Wildlife Festival in September 2014 I was birding at Crane Point with a group and did my impersonation of an Eastern Screech-owl to see if I could attract some wood-warblers. Much to our surprise a juvenile White-crowned Pigeon landed in a nearby tree (see picture), an unforgettable experience.



*White-crowned pigeon by Andy Wraithmell*

### Recommended Sites (Tropical Hardwood Hammocks)

Bill Baggs State Park, Long Key State Park, Fort Zachary Taylor State Park, Key West Botanical Gardens, Everglades National Park, Fakahatchee Strand State Preserve and Ten Thousand Island National Wildlife Refuge.

## One Sky Our Birds

### An International Partnership Celebrating Migratory Bird Conservation

As we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act here are some actions you can take to help migratory birds.

Purchase a [Federal Duck Stamp](#). 98 cents out of every dollar goes directly to purchase vital habitat or acquire conservation easements for protection in the National Wildlife Refuge System. Since 1934, more than 6.5 million acres have been acquired using Federal Duck Stamp revenues. More than 300 National Wildlife Refuges have been created or expanded using Federal Duck Stamp dollars. At least one refuge in every state has benefited from Duck Stamp dollars. Florida's and other state's wildlife management areas provide vital habitat for migratory birds. Support them by purchasing a wildlife management area permit.

Buy shade-grown coffee. Why? Because shade-grown coffee farms are small ecosystems, second only to tropical rain forests in terms of biodiversity. These farms act as oases for more than 150 species of migratory birds whose populations have declined 50 percent in just the past 25 years. Habitat destruction caused by conversion to full-sun coffee plantations is the main causation of this decline. Full-sun plantations have 95 percent fewer bird species than their shaded counterparts. Learn more at [si.edu/SCBI/MigratoryBirds/Coffee/default.cfm](http://si.edu/SCBI/MigratoryBirds/Coffee/default.cfm)

Each year an estimated 100 million birds die due to collisions with windows. There are many ways we can reduce collisions around houses such as moving bird feeders away from reflective windows. To learn more ways in which you can help, visit Cornell's All About Birds – [window collision page](#).

Provide habitat for your back yard. By supplying adequate food, water and shelter, you can increase the number and variety of species visiting our property, improving our chances of observing them more closely while providing the habitat they need to survive. Learn which native plants provide appropriate food and cover for migratory birds, and use them in your home landscaping. Remember to provide a consistent source of clean water.

Practice responsible wildlife viewing. Each time we disrupt them from feeding or raising young, we make them use energy that would have otherwise been used for those essential life history purposes. Or we force them to leave young vulnerable to the elements or predators.

Stay back and use binoculars or a spotting scope to watch wildlife.

Walk around groups of birds on the beach rather than forcing them to fly.

Stay on roads, trails and paths to minimize habitat destruction.

Be active on behalf of wildlife habitat in your community. Work with other citizens, government agencies, conservation organizations and policy makers. It takes collaborative partnerships to conserve

important migratory pathways.

Invest in conservation by supporting a local conservation organization, state/ provincial wildlife agencies, a land trust or your local Audubon Chapter.

Traveling to see wildlife puts a value on the resource. Consider planning a bird or wildlife watching vacation involving some travel, and let your hotelier and area businesses know why you visited. When local businesses know you have come to their area specifically to see birds or other wildlife, they will be more willing to make local decisions that benefit wildlife.

Keeping track of what you see helps. Submit your bird sightings to [eBird](#). eBird's goal is to maximize the utility and accessibility of the vast numbers of bird observations made each year by recreational and professional bird watchers. It is amassing one of the largest and fastest-growing biodiversity data resources ever created. For example, in May 2015, participants reported more than 9.5 million bird observations across the world! The observations of each participant join those of others in an international network of eBird users. eBird then shares these observations with a global community of educators, land managers, ornithologists and conservation biologists. In time, this data will become the foundation for a better understanding of bird distribution across the western hemisphere and beyond.

Most importantly, introduce the outdoors and birds to the next

generation! The next 100 years lies in the hands of our children.

As we all celebrate [International Migratory Bird Day](#), take a minute and set a plan for what you can do to help our feathered friends and be part of the next 100 years.

Now we are going to go outside. We will see you on the trails...

Sign up for alerts by following the link below and join us this fall as we follow the warblers back south.

[One Sky. Our Birds](#)

## Pitcher Plants!

More species of carnivorous plants are found in Florida than in any other state and the most conspicuous of these plants are the pitcher plants. The leaves of some of the six pitcher plant species found in Florida are nearly three feet tall and variously colored yellow-green or reddish with splotches of white or purple. The openings at the top of the tubes are partially or completely covered by brightly patterned hoods. Pitcher plants bloom with yellow, purple or red dangling flowers beginning in late March or early April, sometimes before the new leaves have appeared. Pitcher plants, so named because their erect, hollow leaves resemble pitchers, "eat" insects. The insects are attracted to the bright colors of the flowers or hoods, and to nectar secretions and enticing odors produced by some species. Insects that venture in may encounter downward pointing hairs on a slippery wall that lead down to a pool of digestive



Gulf Purple Pitcherplant by Whitney Gray

enzymes or rainwater at the base of the tube. The digested bugs provide a rich source of nutrients naturally lacking in the wet, acidic soils where pitcher plants grow. Pitcher plants occur as far south as central Florida, but the greatest concentrations are found in the Florida Panhandle, in sites such as the Apalachicola National Forest and Blackwater River State Forest. Fire suppression and habitat loss due to wetland alteration, especially forestry site preparation, have caused the number of pitcher plants to decline. At least four Florida species are now protected under state or federal law.

The [Florida Panhandle Wildflower Alliance](#) has an excellent website with lots of information on where to find pitcher plants and other wildflowers in the Florida Panhandle.



White-top Pitcherplant by Andy Wraithmell



Gulf Purple Pitcherplant by Whitney Gray



Yellow Pitcherplant by Whitney Gray

## Wings Over Florida

Congratulations to the following Wings Over Florida Participants who were awarded certificates between February and May 2016!

### Bird Listing Program

#### ***Northern Cardinal Level (50 to 149 species)***

William Uttenweiler  
Laura Mahoney  
Betty Bishop  
Gill Ness-Collins

#### ***Florida Scrub-Jay Level (150 to 249 species)***

Christina Baal  
Roberto Cavalieros  
Alan Seelye-James  
Adam Pickos  
John Oshlick

#### ***Black Skimmer Level (250 to 299 species)***

Whitney Gray  
Ann Griffin

#### ***Reddish Egret Level (300 to 349 species)***

Debbie Olavarria

#### ***Swallow-tailed Kite Level (350 to 399 species)***

Denise Lane  
Robert Lane  
Richard Mathis

### Butterfly Listing Program

#### ***Zebra Longwing Level (10 to 19 species)***

Alan Seelye-James  
Scott Scheinhaus

#### ***Palamedes Swallowtail Level (40 to 79 species)***

Avery Chan

#### ***Question Mark Level (80 to 119 species)***

Mary Keim

For more information on how to take part in Wings Over Florida [visit our website.](#)

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**MyGFBT** - We now have an Instagram account.  
[instagram.com/greatfloridabirdingtrail](https://instagram.com/greatfloridabirdingtrail)

### Help us keep Kite Tales aloft.

Please consider sending a tax-deductible donation to the Wildlife Foundation of Florida on behalf of the Great Florida Birding & Wildlife Trail.

Please make checks (in U.S. funds only) to the Wildlife Foundation of Florida, with "GFBWT/Kite Tales" written in the memo section of your check. Please send to:

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