Northeast Florida – A Special Place for People and Wildlife

Photo by David Macri

Audubon Florida

North Florida Coastal Conservation
Northeast Florida is an extraordinary place. A remarkable mosaic of conservation lands and water make it a destination for an amazing variety of colorful and interesting migratory birds. It is also a place for people who want to experience the marshes, shores, rivers and woods that make Florida’s First Coast a place of wonders.

Much of the region’s amazing assemblage of natural areas is protected in a network of local, state and national parks. To provide places for people to enjoy nature and for abundant wildlife, the First Coast’s public lands must be well managed. Audubon’s goal is to share these ecologically rich places with people and to encourage stewardship of public lands to benefit people and wildlife.

Many species evolved using the shores, saltmarsh and coastal hammocks of Northeast Florida. Red Knots and Black Skimmers use the beaches, sparrows and wrens bring the saltmarsh to life with song, Painted Buntings breed in the hammocks, Royal Terns hatch chicks in the dunes, songbirds rest and forage in coastal habitats before and after long migrations, and raptors soar along dune lines toward their wintering grounds.

Yet the habitat that so richly endows the First Coast is under constant threat. Development and disturbance drive away birds and other wildlife - reducing the value of the parks and robbing people of the chance to fully experience nature. Much of the First Coast’s appeal to visitors – people and birds alike – has been diminished. But nature is resilient and will recover with help from people like you.

Audubon’s approach is to empower people to see nature up close, to share the experience, discover their passion and commit to stewardship of water, woods and wildlife as their contribution to a better world.

In Northeast Florida Audubon deploys:

- Seven locally led chapters
- More than 100 highly active volunteers
- Staff biologist Stefanie M. Nagid

Backed by Audubon’s statewide network of staff and advocates, we organize support for Northeast Florida’s wildlife and public lands. With a focus on land and water conservation and the places where wildlife shares the shore with people, we support public land management with expertise, on the ground work and outreach to recreational users.

Audubon volunteers have been referred to by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission as the hearty souls “with mud on their boots and sand between their toes” who do the important work of collecting data and sharing with others experience of the natural world.

Audubon volunteer stewards are also advocates. Their knowledge and experience shape their role as a constituency for public resources. Our ranks continue to grow with high school students engaged as volunteer beach stewards at Anastasia State Park in St. Augustine, bringing a new generation to the role.

We’ve already made a difference at six parks including:

- Fort Matanzas National Monument where halting public motor vehicle driving on the beach made the Matanzas inlet safe for many birds: in particular nesting Least Terns and Wilson’s Plovers, and wintering Piping Plovers.
- Huguenot Memorial Park where the City of Jacksonville has reduced vehicle intrusion into areas used by nesting and migratory shorebirds.
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This banded Red Knot was seen in Argentina nine days before this photo was shot at Fort George Inlet. It migrated more than 4000 miles.

The results are safer places for nesting birds to raise their families, for migrating birds to stop, rest and forage, and for human families to enjoy the natural spectacle of these places.

Beyond deploying volunteer stewards Audubon plays respected roles on state and federal agency resource management teams. Ms. Nagid serves on the advisory group for the Guana Tolomato Matanzas National Estuarine Research Reserve. She also advises local, state and federal agencies on the potential for habitat management improvements and actively participates in recommendations for best management practices related to navigation channel dredging and sea level rise mitigation.

Audubon is committed to Florida’s First Coast because it is ecologically linked to the hemispheric Atlantic coastal flyway. This is best demonstrated by migratory and wintering birds - overwater travelers that stop in Northeast Florida to use the remaining coastal habitats. Audubon is working with partners along the Atlantic Flyway to make sure the habitats so important to migration are preserved, restored and well managed. Florida’s First Coast benefits from and contributes to the ecological wealth of the Atlantic Flyway. Through habitat stewardship and by enlisting citizens and visitors, Audubon is helping make the First Coast a destination for birds and people alike.

RESULTS WE CAN BE PROUD OF: Jacksonville’s Huguenot Memorial Park is the last major seabird nesting site on Florida’s East Coast, made even more important given the potential for wholesale failure of beach nesting on Florida’s Gulf Coast due to hurricane activity. First Coast productivity is a result of volunteer bird stewarding and good management leveraged by Audubon advocacy.

PEOPLE WE ARE PROUD OF: Seven chapters – Duval, St. Johns, Flagler, Santa Fe, Four Rivers, Alachua and Marion – are the foundation of Audubon’s work in Northeast Florida. Working together on coastal habitat and water conservation, these hearty leaders make a difference in their communities and the region. Audubon’s board includes four directors from Northeast Florida, each contributing time and money to carry our mission forward.

FIRST COAST DONORS WE CAN DEPEND ON: Foundations such as Jessie Ball duPont, River Branch and companies such as Rayonier have matched the funds from individual contributors to underwrite the costs of Audubon’s work in Northeast Florida.

ADVOCACY BEYOND THE BEACH: Audubon has a strong connection to First Coast shorebirds, however there is more to the region than just the beach. Audubon staff collaborates with the region’s local chapters and public land managers to advocate for greater protections of water resources and improved habitat management for target Atlantic Flyway bird species.

FLORIDA’S VOICE OF CONSERVATION: Audubon Florida’s staff, board and volunteers work statewide in the protection of land and water and Everglades restoration. With a network of scientists, sanctuary managers and conservation advocates, Audubon is viewed as Florida’s most effective conservation group.
Our Vision:

Connect People to Nature – We know that when people experience parks and see wildlife they appreciate the importance of taking care of these special places.

Coastal Conservation – Enlisting people in protecting Northeast Florida’s breeding, wintering and migratory bird stopover habitat is critical to the survival of dozens of species.

Meeting the Challenge of Sea Level Rise – To guarantee a future for Northeast Florida’s natural resources, we are helping to predict and monitor the impacts to wildlife and plot a course for habitat migration.

Public Land Stewardship – Getting people involved and finding the right balance between the needs of people and wildlife on our public lands is critical.

Water for the Environment – Working with our conservation partners, Audubon fights for the state and national laws that protect waterways like the St. Johns River and the springs and lakes that make Northeast Florida a special place.

What you can do:

TIME: You can commit, as an Audubon volunteer, through public service or as a member of our board to help steward Northeast Florida’s special places.

MONEY: You can support Audubon’s conservation work by being a donor and asking others – friends, businesses and foundations - to give money to underwrite the costs of habitat stewardship and advocacy.

INFORMED ACTION: Stay in touch and take action when requested through our e-newsletter and social media sites.

Contact Audubon Florida through Stefanie M. Nagid at snagid@audubon.org or 386-288-2794.