



Corkscrew
Swamp Sanctuary

Along the Boardwalk

December, 2007

www.corkscrew.audubon.org

Upcoming Events

- Dec. 7 Volunteer Potluck Dinner
(sign up in Bunting House)
- Dec. 12 Boardwalk Night Walk
- Dec. 15 Christmas Bird Count
- Dec. 19 Boardwalk Night Walk

New interns' varied backgrounds add to programs

Yokwe everyone! I'm **Amy Fleischer** and I'm really excited to be interning from September to March.

I grew up in Boston and went to the University of Connecticut (BA, English/sociology) and Emerson College (MA, writing/publishing). I make a mean margarita, can weave 50 baskets out of palm fronds in 30 minutes, love to hang out with eagle rays 100 feet under water, and have twice snuck into Fenway Park to watch the Red Sox beat the Yankees.

I edited science books and magazines for six years before moving to the Marshall Islands for a year to teach elementary school and study marine ecol-

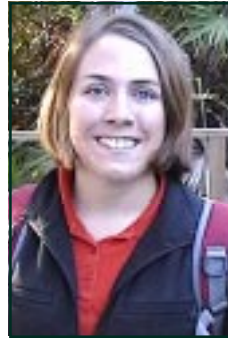


ogy. In the Marshalls, *yokwe* means both "hello" and "you are a rainbow," so feel free to shout out a "yokwe" to me.

This is the tail end of my "year of internships" during which I've been exploring careers in environmental education and management in such locales as Honduras,

Turks and Caicos, and Maine.

Heather Brushaber's career goal is to become a park naturalist for the National Park Service. She is gaining experience in the areas of natural science and outdoor education while between college (BA in Environmental Studies from



Principia College in Illinois) and forthcoming graduate school.

During her undergraduate time, she worked in a nine-month biology program in New Zealand, and since graduation she has worked at Wind Cave National Park in South Dakota, for the Bureau of Indian Affairs at Turtle Mountain in North Dakota, as staff

working with elementary and middle school programs at two outdoor learning centers in Michigan, and as a naturalist at the Formar Nature Preserve in Burton, Michigan.

In September, she completed coursework at the National Outdoor Leadership School in the Rocky Mountains.

Quick ID Guide

Little Blue Heron vs. Tri-colored Heron (and Reddish Egret)

Identifying adult Little Blue and Tri-colored Herons may be confusing, but there are distinct differences.

The body of the Tri-colored Heron, *below*, is two-toned with a dark breast and contrasting light belly (it wears white "pants.") The front of the neck has a narrow white and red coloration.



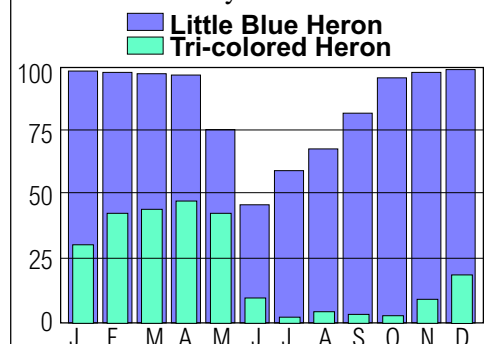
The body of the Little Blue Heron, *below*, is solid slate-blue although the neck may show a slight reddish-purple cast in spring and summer.

Little Blues hunt by waiting or by slowly stalking their prey. Tri-colored sometimes chase prey with open wings similar to the way Reddish Egrets hunt,



but the egrets are typically salt water birds and are not found at Corkscrew.

The Tri-colored is usually seen only when water levels drop ; the Little Blue is present all year. The chart below represents the percent of days each month that each species is seen from the boardwalk by a volunteer.



Bird Trivia

What is a buzzard, really, and are any found in Collier County?

Discover the answer at www.collieriaudubon.org/birding.html

What's the vine that is blanketing plants at the two lettuce lakes?

The plant is Moonvine, *Ipomea alba*, and it is a native, tropical plant that is a perennial evergreen in warmer climates.

Moonvine grows fast and begins to "run" as soon as it has its second set of leaves. Vines in full sun get the fullest flowers and the plants prefer a soil rich in organic matter and ample moisture.

However, growth is limited if the soil moisture is "too ample," as during our normal rainy seasons. Only during extremely dry conditions in the swamp does it blanket whatever it is climbing. That happened



in 2000-2001 with a prolonged dry-down, and it is happening this season. When the water returns, they die back, and because they are tropical, cold temperatures also cause them to die back.

The six-inch blooms begin opening as the sun goes down and last only one night. Long, elegant buds quickly unfurl into six-inch flowers with white petals that gleam in the dusk and under a full moon. Hence, the name "Moonvine."

By noon, the petals have closed, barely visible in the dense foliage, and begin to fall off of the plant.

Moonvine flowers all year and its heavy fragrance attracts Sphinx moths, which pollinate them. The aroma has been described as "lily-like" and "honeysuckle-like."

Moonvine is grouped with the Morning Glories as *Ipomoea*.



Moonvine at the south lake in August.

November Sightings



A Purple Gallinule frequented the south lake toward the end of the month (November 20).



A Chicken Turtle basks on a log in front of the shortcut trail bench (November 23).



A Short-tailed Hawk glides over the wet prairie (November 6) photo: Jack Kreager

Audubon of Florida volunteers of the Year

Kris Gabel and Greg Nelson were honored at this year's Audubon of Florida assembly in November.

"Kris and Greg epitomize the Audubon volunteer," said Ed Carlson. "They give generously of their time, talents and enthusiasm to carry out the Audubon mission in Southwest Florida."

"Both of us have always had a strong desire to volunteer and give back to the community," said Kris, "because we believe we have been very fortunate in our lives. We were always impressed at the quality of the sanctuary and at the excitement, sophistication and dedication of the volunteers. We

really enjoy helping others and knowing that our work there will help people enjoy this special place for generations to come."

Kris is a practicing corporate attorney and CPA. Greg is a retired technology company owner and is active in non-profit organizations. He is currently chairman of SCORE in Naples.

Since moving to Southwest Florida from Minnesota in 1998, their involvement with Corkscrew has grown from being visitors to distinguishing themselves as volunteers in a variety of roles at the sanctuary.

After attending the Florida Master Naturalist Wetlands course, Kris and

Greg jumped in as volunteers. Kris enthusiastically joined the boardwalk naturalists and she now is co-chair of the Volunteer Fundraising Committee and gathers and reports monthly bird count statistics.

Greg plunged in to resource management and is often seen on a 4x4 in the back country clearing brush to maintain trails and fire lines. He even brought his own chainsaw out after Hurricane Wilma to clear the south road access to the Sanctuary.

Both are guides for education programs, are members of the Friends of Corkscrew, and are committed financial supporters of the sanctuary.

Turkey Vulture

Cathartes aura



Bald is beautiful, for Turkey Vultures. But pretty? Probably not.

While pretty focuses solely on outer physical appearance, beauty is as much how a thing lives as how a thing looks.

A Turkey Vulture is a beautiful bird. It is a timid, patient, non-confrontational creature with amazing talents: the best sense of smell of the New World vultures, excellent eyesight, and one of the most skilled and graceful gliders of all North American birds.

Contrary to myth, the Turkey Vulture does not eat live animals. And contrary to another popular belief, it does not feed strictly on carrion. It enjoys plant matter including shoreline vegetation, pumpkin, and bits of other crops.

A Turkey Vulture, called a TV by birders, won't eat just anything. It prefers fairly fresh meat and usually bypasses rotten meat. It prefers the meat of herbivorous animals, avoiding that of dogs and other carnivores. In fact, all scavengers and predatory animals, including people, prefer to feed on herbivorous animals, which are tastier.

In short, a TV prefers to avoid carcasses of cats, dogs, and coyotes unless those are the only available food. And if there's a lack of carrion, it can go many days without eating because of its extreme energy efficiency in the air.

A Turkey Vulture soars above the ground for most of the day searching for food with its excellent eyesight and highly developed sense of smell. It is often along roadsides cleaning up roadkill, or near rivers feasting on washed-up fish, another favorite food.

The Turkey Vulture first finds food using its incredible sense of smell. It is attracted to the scent of mercaptan, the gas produced by the beginnings of decay. So fine-tuned is the sense of smell that when a piping company was trying to find a leak in a gas line, it pumped mercaptan through the lines and within minutes, Turkey Vultures began to circle over the leaking section, 40 miles away.

Once at a food site, the vulture's bald head becomes an advantage. When a vulture eats carrion, it must often stick

its head inside the carcass to reach meat. A feathered head would pick up unwanted pieces of the meal with all of the accompanying bacteria. A bald head picks up very little. After eating, the TV perches in the heat of the sun where whatever may still cling to the fuzz on the head is baked off.

Another unique adaptation kills harmful bacteria. The digestive acids in a TV's stomach are so strong that they kill virtually all bacteria and viruses they encounter. There is even evidence to support the claim that TVs can consume meat infected with anthrax and their digestive system destroys that virus.

Those digestive acids make TV uric acid so strong that it, too, kills bacteria. So because of the nature of the digestive system, vulture poop is a very good sanitizer. After stepping in a carcass, a TV will often expel its waste, which is fluid, onto its legs. The uric acid kills any bacteria that may have been picked up from the dead animal.

In the air, a Turkey Vulture is equally amazing. It waits until the sun has warmed the morning air before launching itself from its nighttime perch into the rising air and breezes. Vultures

tend to roost in dead or open trees where there are no small branches and leaves to get in the way or to interrupt updrafts. Once airborne, the TV circles upward searching for a thermal.

When it rises to the top of a thermal, it may ride upper air currents, or it may dive across the sky at speeds up to 60 miles per hour, losing altitude until it reaches another thermal, where it rises again. This is done without the need for a single wing flap, enabling it to glide for hours at high altitudes.

A TV maintains stability and lift at low altitudes by holding its wings up in a slight dihedral (V-shape) and teetering from side to side to take advantage of every possible trace of wind and updraft. Its six foot wingspan and wing feathers are specially adapted to give it tremendous buoyancy in the air. However, the necessary flaps at takeoffs from the ground are quite laborious, so TVs often fall victim to predators and cars.

Male and female Turkey Vultures are identical in color and do not differ significantly in size or weight.

They raise only one brood a year. The "nest" is a small scratched indentation in the ground and may be in caves, hollowed logs, or even on the floors of abandoned barns and sheds.

Two blotchy eggs incubate for about 40 days and both parents share the incubating and caring for the brood. Young fledge 70 to 80 days after hatching, at which time they have darker heads and beaks and at a distance may be confused with Black Vultures.

TV Trivia

Its Latin name, *Cathartes aura*, comes from the Greek *kathartes*, "cleanser, purifier," and from *aurum*, "gold."

A group of vultures is called a "Venue." Vultures circling in the air are a "Kettle."

Turkey vultures have very few vocalization capabilities: hisses (when they feel threatened) and grunts (from hungry young, and from adults in courtship).