



Corkscrew  
Swamp Sanctuary

## Along the Boardwalk

February, 2009

[www.corkscrew.audubon.org](http://www.corkscrew.audubon.org)

### Bald Eagles nesting at Corkscrew

Bald Eagles have been heard calling since late December in the pine flatwoods south of the Plume Hunter rain shelter, but they had not been seen until one morning in mid January when Mike Knight located an eagle nest while inspecting fire plow lines.

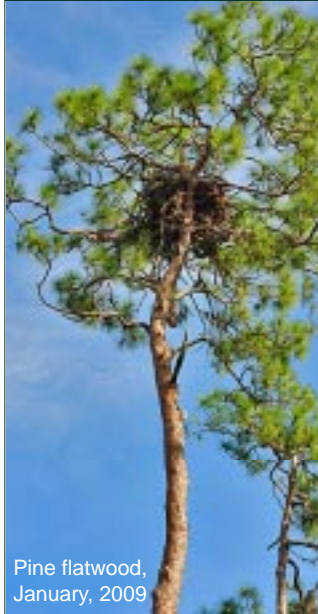
The nest is in the top of a pine tree, *far right*, in the same area where the Gopher Tortoises and Red-cockaded Woodpeckers were observed earlier.

White feather tufts around the top of the nest suggested that the nest may have or may just have had chicks. The following morning, a single mature eagle head was seen poking just over the top of the nest.

The nest is not directly visible from the boardwalk nor is it accessible to the general public or volunteers. The best opportunity to get a clear view of adult birds flying to and from the nest is by



Shortcut trail,  
October, 2007



Pine flatwood,  
January, 2009

looking south from the Plume Hunter rain shelter, by looking along the boardwalk between the rain shelter and the open bench at the end of the wet prairie, or by looking southeast from that bench.

This is the first time eagles have been documented nesting at Corkscrew since World War II.



visit [www.birdsource.org/gbbc/](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/)

### Where are the birds?

by John Ogden, Audubon of Florida  
Director of Bird Conservation

I don't know if there is a "scientific response" at this point because I haven't heard anyone explain what is going on. But many people have commented that birds seem unusually scarce this winter. Here at our home north of Homestead we saw about one-third fewer species in November and December than in previous winters.

At this point, the message is that Audubon scientists are fully aware that birds are unusually scarce this winter. But why the apparent sharp decline this winter is not yet understood.

We will be examining the results of recent Christmas Counts to try to further understand which species and in what habitats the recent declines have occurred. We also encourage people to participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count. The more information we can get on which species and which locations, the more likely we will begin to understand what is going on and can decide what, if anything, can be done.

### Quick ID Guide: Three of Corkscrew's more commonly seen fishing spiders

Three species of fishing spiders are often seen from the boardwalk. All are in the nursery web spider family.

The **Six-spotted Fishing Spider** (*Dolomedes triton*) is usually at the water surface and has white bands down each side of its carapace and abdomen with paired white spots on the top of the abdomen. It can dive under water and stay under for up to 45 minutes to catch small fish, tadpoles, and other aquatic creatures. It also functions well on land. Its success rate under water is only 9% because it has a hard time distinguishing between prey-generated ripples and those made by falling leaves and twigs.

The **Okeefinokee Fishing Spider** (*Dolomedes okefinokensis*) is the big boy of the family with a leg span reaching five inches. It is often found on the trunks of cypress trees and is capable of catching and eating treefrogs.

The **Whitebanded Fishing Spider** (*Dolomedes albineus*) has noticeably banded legs and is not one of the more aquatic species. It is generally found in trees and may be well away from water. Its head sits high on the carapace.



Six-spotted



Okeefinokee



Whitebanded

### Bird Trivia

What state used to be known as "The Eagle State"?

Discover the answer at [www.collieraudubon.org/birding.html](http://www.collieraudubon.org/birding.html)

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## In Case a Visitor Asks

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### What do Alligators eat?

Alligators are carnivores, so their diet is meat... any kind of meat.

They are opportunistic feeders that are efficient scavengers as well as predators, and they will eat whatever is the easiest to catch.

At Corkscrew, they most frequently eat fish. The alligator at the near right caught a Bowfin at the south lake. When larger fish are unavailable, such as this year with the drought, they turn to their second choice: turtles.

Their jaws are strong enough that they can crush the shell, and their digestive acids strong enough that they



completely digest all of the shell and bones as well as the meat.

Third on the list of food is smaller alligators. A mother won't eat her own young, but every other alligator will. That's why small gators rarely are in the presence of decidedly larger ones.



If none of those foods is available, they eat anything else that fits in their mouths. With a scarcity of aquatic prey, they may resort to eating wading or swimming birds, mammals that come to water to drink, and will even settle for frogs and crayfish if necessary.

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## January Sightings

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A Northern Parula Warbler forages for insects in a fig tree along the shortcut trail (January 13).



Rigid Epidendrum Orchid blooms began opening at the start of the month (January 9).



A Great Blue Heron displays mating plumage between the lakes (January 13).

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## Meet the Interns

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**Kyle Pritchard** is from Eugene, Oregon. He received his B.S. in Ecology from Evergreen State College in Olympia, WA. He previously worked for Mt. Rainier National Park, the Klamath National Forest, and the Nature Conservancy. At Mt. Rainier he surveyed native amphibian populations in alpine lakes. With the Forest Service, he worked with fire and threatened cypress trees, *Cupressus bakeri*. Most recently, he worked to restore prairie habitat for the endangered Fenders blue butterfly in Oregon. He looks forward to an exciting internship at Corkscrew.

**Kate Halstead** is a New Hampshire native, and comes most recently from southern Oregon. In June, she re-



ceived her B.S. in Ecology with a focus on Ornithology from Evergreen State College in Olympia, WA. Her work experience has included prairie restoration with Americorps, northern goshawk research with the Forest Service and breeding passerine surveys with the Klamath Bird Observatory in Oregon. Kate's interest in tropical habitats has been piqued during recent ad-

ventures, and she is excited to be able to experience daily life in the swamp.

**Beth Beimel** is from Germantown, Wisconsin, and is a recent graduate of the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point with a B.S in Resource Management with a focus on environmental education and interpretation, with a minor in museum techniques. Last summer she worked for the U.S Forest Service as an interpretive ranger in the Chugach National Forest in Alaska. She has taught environmental education at the Central Wisconsin Environmental Station and trained to be a wild land fire fighter. She is overwhelmed the kindness of everyone she has meet here at the swamp.

Red-shouldered Hawks are a common forest-dwelling hawk that favors woodlands near water. They are perhaps the most vocal American hawk.

There are five subspecies. The four eastern forms contact each other, but the west coast form is separated from the eastern forms by 1000 miles. The northern form is the largest.

The South Florida subspecies is the smallest and the palest of the five subspecies, having an entirely buff breast and stomach with very faint barring, and having a grayish head.

Some of the northern subspecies may migrate here during the winter and are identifiable by dark chests, a dark heads, and darker backs and wings. It may be confusing to visitors to see both subspecies in the same location.

Red-shouldered Hawk sizes range from 17-24 inches with a wingspan of 37-44 inches. The wings are distinguishable in the air by a pale crescent near each wing tip; the tail is striped black and white. The name "red-shouldered" comes from a rusty-red patch on the upper part (shoulder) of the wing. The sexes are similar although the female is slightly larger.

The most similar species is the Broad-winged Hawk, which has just one broad white band on its tail and is completely pale under the wings.

The juvenile Red-shouldered Hawk has an almost white breast with dark streaks. The bands on its tail are dark and light brown.

Scientists have identified seven separate songs; the most often heard is a loud *kee-aah* with the second note descending in pitch. The hawks call frequently.

Favored Red-shouldered habitats are mature deciduous or mixed deciduous-conifer swamps and forests.

Red-shouldered Hawks prefer lowlands, especially swampy woods and bogs, where they hunt by watching

## Red-shouldered Hawk

*Buteo lineatus*



quietly from a low perch and dropping down on to the prey. Favorite foods are snakes and frogs, supplemented with insects, small mammals and alligators, birds, turtles, amphibians, and crayfish.

It will watch small wading birds, especially White Ibis and Little Blue Herons, and if one catches a hawk-sized meal, it will suddenly swoop down and try to steal the food.

Red-shouldered Hawks are monogamous and territorial. Courtship displays occur on the breeding grounds and involve soaring together in broad circles while calling, or soaring and diving toward one another. These courtship flights usually occur in late morning and early afternoon.

Florida Red-shouldered Hawks breed once per year in the late winter/early spring. They often reuse previous nests with the male and female building or refurbishing the nest, which are typically 20 to 60 feet above the ground in the forks of branches of deciduous trees in wet woodland areas.

The nest is large and deep, constructed from sticks, twigs, shredded bark, and leaves. They prefer to have dead trees nearby, where they can perch and enjoy an unobstructed view of the swamp floor.

The female lays from two to five eggs over the course of two to three days. Incubation begins when the first or second egg is laid, and lasts for 33 days. Hatching is asynchronous, with up to seven days between the first and last chick. The nestlings are altricial, and are brooded nearly constantly by the female for at least a week.

The male brings food to the nest for the female and nestlings during the nestling stage, which lasts approximately six weeks. Chicks begin to leave the nest at six weeks, but are fed by the parents for another 8 to 10 weeks. Chicks become independent of the parents at 17 to 19 weeks. Still, they may continue to roost in or near the nest at night.

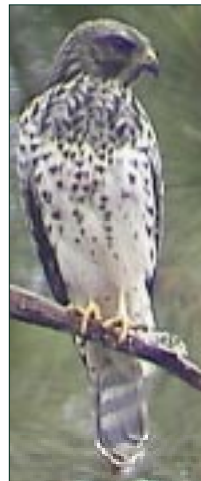
Red-shouldered Hawks can begin breeding when they are one year old. Although the average life span in the wild is a little over two years, the oldest known wild Red-shouldered Hawk lived almost 20 years.



northern subspecies



Florida subspecies



juvenile

- By the time they are five days old, nestling Red-shouldered Hawks can shoot their feces over the edge of their nest. Bird poop on the ground is a sign of an active nest.

- The clearing of forests over the last two centuries probably led to decreases in populations of the Red-shouldered Hawk while increasing habitat for the Red-tailed Hawk.