



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

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SFWMD, Audubon Bird-Watching Tours Spread Wings to Palm Beach County

New tour follows Christmas Bird Count documenting 118 species south of Lake Okeechobee



Local photographers snapped shots of dozens of birds at recent bird-watching and Christmas Bird Count trips to Stormwater Treatment Areas 1 East in Wellington and 5 in Hendry County. From left, peregrine falcon, roseate spoonbill, palm warbler. Credits: Ken Corregan, SFWMD and Richard Hodgkins. (Click on the pictures for larger versions.)

West Palm Beach, FL – Framed by a gathering of blue-winged teals and black American coots, the brilliant pink of a single roseate spoonbill stood out to nearly 40 avian enthusiasts at the inaugural bird-watching tour at an Everglades Stormwater Treatment Area (STA) in Wellington.

Birders documented 10 duck species, 8 raptor species and a variety of wading birds totaling more than 67 species during the first outing conducted January 7 by the Audubon Society of the Everglades and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) in the wetland built to clean water flowing to the Everglades.

“This was a high-flying start to the District’s new collaboration with the Audubon Society of the Everglades,” said SFWMD Executive Director Melissa Meeker. “The new birding tours allow us to expand recreational opportunities and showcase wildlife on District lands that are improving Everglades water quality.”

With cameras and long-range viewing scopes, the bird watchers caravanned across about 9 miles of the internal levees that separate the water-cleaning cells of the wetland. They frequently stopped at choice locations to view wildlife in the expanse of water and specialized plants that take up phosphorus before it enters the Everglades.

“Could it be a tern?” asked Lighthouse Point resident Andrew Morris as he peered through a pair of binoculars. Indeed, it was a Caspian tern, according to a field guide and his fellow bird watchers. “There’s another [black-necked] stilt behind the wood stork. It’s amazing what you see out there . . . This is just fantastic.”

Audubon of the Everglades will lead tours at the site on the first Saturday each month through April. Additional tour dates during that time and future outings will be posted on the [Audubon of the Everglades website](#).

The STA-1 East tour program was modeled after the popular partnership with the Hendry-Glades Audubon Society, which has served more than 5,100 bird watchers and photographers from across the globe at Stormwater Treatment Area 5 in Hendry County. Audubon volunteers, in cooperation with the District, have led 135 individual tours at the site to date.

Renowned as havens for birds and wildlife, Stormwater Treatment Areas are the water-cleaning workhorses of Everglades restoration, naturally using plants to remove phosphorus from water flowing into the fabled *River of Grass*. The District operates a network of six STAs south of Lake Okeechobee with a combined area of more than 52,000 acres. Since 1994, the treatment areas have retained more than 1,400 metric tons of total phosphorus that would have otherwise entered the Everglades.

2011 Christmas Bird Count Results

Birding enthusiasts convened in STA-5 for the 112th Christmas Bird Count on December 31, 2011. Volunteers with the Hendry-Glades Audubon Society partnered with the District to document 118 species and more than 131,000 individual birds. Known as “citizen science,” bird counts are vital to studies of the long-term health and status of bird populations.

More than 50 Audubon volunteers made the trip to STA-5 just south of Lake Okeechobee in Hendry County for a day of intensive bird watching. Of the diverse array of bird species sighted within a 15-mile radius of the STA-5-Clewiston site,

Recreation at STA-1 East

- The treatment wetland offers a public access point for hiking, bicycling, bird watching and nature photography.
- Also featured are an information kiosk, directional signs, paved parking and a composting toilet.
- The recreation area is open from sunrise to sunset on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays.

highlights included a snow goose, gray kingbird, Cassin's kingbird and a white-throated sparrow.

The bird count at STA-5 once again served as a prelude to another partnership year of Audubon/SFWMD birding tours that showcase wildlife and public access on lands managed in perpetuity by the District for Everglades restoration. The more than 6,000-acre constructed wetland, just south of Clewiston, is today one of 489 sites on The Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail. Sponsored by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), the sites are selected for their prolific bird watching or bird education and wildlife-viewing opportunities.

The District provides a variety of recreational opportunities on public lands while continuing to manage them to support environmental restoration, water supply, water quality and flood control missions. At present, the District has opened 621,000 acres of land to the public. Many of these properties are in their natural state or have enhancements such as picnic tables, informational kiosks, campsites and hiking trails. For more information on recreational opportunities throughout the District's 16-county region, visit www.sfwmd.gov/recreation.

More Information:

- [Full Christmas Bird Count Results Database](#) (Numbers are still being reported.)
- [STA-5 Bird-Watching Tour Schedule](#)

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About the South Florida Water Management District

The South Florida Water Management District is a regional, governmental agency that oversees the water resources in the southern half of the state – 16 counties from Orlando to the Keys. It is the oldest and largest of the state's five water management districts. The agency mission is to manage and protect water resources of the region by balancing and improving water quality, flood control, natural systems and water supply. A key initiative is cleanup and restoration of the Everglades.