

The Limpkin



*Newsletter of the
Space Coast Audubon Society of Brevard County, Florida*

March 1 2026, Volume 70, Issue 3

Limpkin Spring Edition

Dee Fairbanks Simpson, Editor

Welcome to the Spring Limpkin! Thanks so much to all those who contributed to this winter edition. Please join me in welcoming new members this month, Alyssa and Francisco! We hope to see you at a meeting soon.

Featured articles this month are:

- Upcoming Space Coast Audubon Events
- Cornell Lab Bird Academy Learning Opportunities By Bert Alm: Learn about all of the educational opportunities that Cornell offers to birders.
- Grab Your Binoculars! Let's Do Brunch By Heather Elko: Read about some hidden birding gems in Historic Downtown Melbourne.
- Ecuador Part 2 By Matt Heyden: Read the continuing adventures of Matt and Lora on the Magic Birding Circuit, 13 years later. In this installment: Tandayapa lodge.
- Not Your Childhood Heroes: Comparing the Lorax, the Onceler, and Horton by Heather Stapleton: In this fascinating article, discover how some Dr. Seuss characters aren't all you thought they were, and how some were so much more!

Upcoming Space Coast Audubon Events

Please to go <https://www.meetup.com/space-coast-audubon-meetup/> for details of all coming events.

- **Weekly: Every Saturday at 9:00 a.m.:** Bird Walks at Sams House at Pine Island, 6195 N Tropical Trail, Merritt Island, FL, US
- **Sat, Mar 7, 2026 · 8:00 a.m.: Beginning Birdwatching** - Rotary Park, 1899 South Courtenay Parkway, Merritt Island, FL. Kate Wells, PhD, Naturalist and Environmental Program Supervisor at Rotary Park will lead.
- **Friday, Mar 13, 2026, 6:30 p.m.: SCAS Monthly meeting.** Rockledge Presbyterian Church, 921 Rockledge Dr, Rockledge, FL. Speaker TBA on Meetup.
- **Sat, Apr 4, 2026 · 8:00 a.m.: Beginning Birdwatching** - Veterans Memorial Park, Merritt Island Brevard Veteran's Memorial Center, 400 S. Sykes Creek Parkway, Merritt Island, FL, US. Kate Wells, PhD, Naturalist and Environmental Program Supervisor at Rotary Park will lead.
- **Sat, May 2, 2026 · 8:00 a.m.: Beginning Birdwatching** - Rotary Park, 1899 South Courtenay Parkway, Merritt Island, FL. Kate Wells, PhD, Naturalist and Environmental Program Supervisor at Rotary Park will lead.

Cornell Lab Bird Academy Learning Opportunities

By Bert Alm

Have you ever wished you were better at identifying birds, or taking photos of birds, or even doing field illustrations? I'm sure we would all like to increase our abilities or even learn new ways to enjoy our birding hobby. I think the Cornell Lab Bird Academy is a wonderful resource for expanding your knowledge and skills.

The Cornell Lab Bird Academy available at <https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/> has a multitude of resources including courses, learning games and webinars. I started the courses with eBird Essentials. This was a free course to introduce you to eBird as well as the other course selections. During the Covid days Cornell offered their courses at deep discounts and occasionally included some free courses. I expanded my library during that time and was amazed at the quality of the materials which include videos, articles, quizzes, custom practice tools, discussions, and more. These self-paced courses help you to train at home, before you travel or go out into the field. With no time limit, you can take as long as you need and revisit as often as you want. The selections include courses for beginners, those who want to gain a deeper knowledge of a particular type of bird (gulls, owls, woodpeckers), and even a comprehensive bird biology course that you can supplement with the Handbook of Bird Biology. There are over 25 courses currently and more added each year.

Besides the free eBird Essentials course you can also add a new course to your personal library each calendar year. Take Flight with Bird Academy Course Assistance available at <https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/take-flight-with-bird-academy-course-assistance/> allows you to choose one course each calendar year for free. I was a little skeptical but thought I would check it out. You choose the course you want for free and fill out a short form explaining why you want the course, if you have other courses that you would like to see developed, and if you are involved in environmental efforts. I filled this out in less than a minute clicked on the Receive Course button and then I got the code to enter in the sales form. I applied for the Gull ID course (normally \$125) last year and sure enough, I got it for free. This year I applied for and received The Wonderful World of Woodpeckers. Is that awesome or what?

The learning games available at <https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/learning-games/> provide interactive experiences designed to explore topics such as flight, song, dance, feathers, and additional aspects of avian biology. There are quizzes, interactive videos, and more.

Another free thing I found on Bird Academy (it showed up in my course Dashboard) is the BirdWise ID trial. BirdWise ID available at <https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/birdwise/> allows you to Level up your bird ID skills with custom quizzing. It's essentially a flash card system where you get two different birds that are often confused and you pick out the one that is named. I gave this a try and was surprised that I missed a few that I should not have but they included so many alternate plumages, including baby birds, that it was a bit challenging. The free sample quiz (35 species) is quite extensive, and you can do some customizing. Recently I spent some time doing this (it's actually a fun game) and I reviewed 540 questions (10 questions at a time takes less than a minute), with 97% accuracy. Those 540 questions covered 30 species, and I have not completed any of the species yet. The first set of pairings are easier and then it gets progressively harder. I believe I've only covered 7% of the sample quiz so far. For \$60 a year you can get access to all 640 species currently in the database. You can also sign up for only one month at \$5.99 to try beyond the sample quiz. I think the best part is it looks like the level of customization would allow you to concentrate just on



David Simpson says: Oh yeah smarty-pants? What's this bird?

warblers or gulls or shorebirds. Watch out David Simpson, I'm coming for you.

The final section of learning tools on the Cornell Lab Bird Academy is the live and recorded webinars available at <https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/live-events/> . With over a hundred recorded webinars available, most of which are free, you can enjoy videos on birding and birders. Almost every topic related to birding can be found in this section and occasionally Cornell Lab provides live webinars for you to enjoy also.

The Cornell Lab Bird Academy is a fantastic resource with many free and low-cost offerings for you to improve your birding knowledge and identification skills. Check out the links I've provided above and let the learning and fun begin.

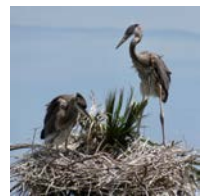
Grab Your Binoculars! Let's Do Brunch

By Heather Elko

Historic Downtown Melbourne is well known for its street fairs, parades, and 5k runs. But perhaps the biggest year-round attraction is its variety of shops and eateries. From southern-style fried green tomatoes to crepes, from pizza to pastries, and kabobs to shepherd's pie, New Haven Avenue is a diner's delight. In contrast, a different and equally delightful attraction is quite nearby: two very good birding parks, Kiwanis Park at Geiger Point, and Claude Edge Front Street Park. Both parks are identified in eBird as "hot spots." The two parks, only a half mile away from the urban setting, are a worthwhile birding destination with benefits.

Drivers heading east over the busy Melbourne Causeway on U.S.192 may, if they glance to the right, see a gray County Park sign leading into Kiwanis Park at Geiger Point (KPGP). On the sidewalk that parallels the highway a colorfully army of walkers, joggers, and baby carriage pushers get their exercise with a fabulous view of the Intracoastal Waterway below. Also below is a hidden birding treasure with enough exposure to woods and watery habitat to host sea birds, waders, ducks, and song birds in one compact 7-acre package. KPGP has a quarter mile of paved pathway along the mangrove-lined shore, a pavilion, and a total of four picnic tables. There are fishing spots on the sandy beach and opportunities to simply commune with nature. For drivers who would prefer to avoid the causeway, the park is easily accessed by a sidewalk connecting it to the Front Street Park boat launch area. There are restrooms by the boat ramps. Round trip from Front Street Park to KPGP is only 4/10 of a mile

Seen on a birding trip to KPGP in February 2026, were two active Great Blue Heron nests. Youthful squawks tipped off passersby to the nests propped in the branches of two dead Australian pines high above the path. It is touching to think that just a month earlier during the worst cold spell in years, with "feels like" temperatures in the teens and winds of 30 mph, two mother herons clung to those nests amidst creaking limbs, protecting their eggs. Weeks later they could rest--sort of--with squirming youngsters poking up from beneath them. Mates foraged nearby and returned with food, spending a few moments for some mutual preening before heading off again.



Baby Great Blue Herons by
Dee Fairbanks Simpson

The heron activity was peaceful compared to that of at least two dozen Anhingas that strived to arrange themselves high in the greenery of the pine trees, flapping and grumbling as they settled down in the golden afternoon light. In the morning some of the lie-a-beds were still there (and still grumbling), while others had gone fishing. Later they would clamber out of the water to dry themselves in the tangle of White mangroves that line the shore and walkway.

Ospreys, Brown Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorants, Great Blue, Little Blue, and Green Herons all can be seen at KPGP. Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, and White Ibis stalk the beaches, and Mottled Ducks, a Lesser

Scaup, and a Common Loon floated just off shore that particular trip. The oyster beds and leggy mangrove roots are excellent places to discern secretive birds.



Scorpionstail photo by
Dee Fairbanks Simpson

For birders who are generalists, native plants are another point of pleasure here. On the south side of the point is a dense stand of the succulent, Saltwort, and a sprawl of Sea Ox-Eye starting to bloom, proving how forgiving nature is after such a wintry blast. Scorpionstail, too, already was in delicate flower. As the path curves around toward the eastern side of the park, the causeway bridge comes into view, one of many great photo ops at the park. On that side Yaupon Holly and numerous Necklace Pod shrubs occur. A native plant garden has been established near the water's edge, featuring Seaside Golden Rod and other pollinator pleasers. KPGP is a project of the Florida Living Shorelines Program, and clearly this has been a successful restoration. <https://floridalivingshorelines.com/projects/central-projects/geiger-point/>

The center of the park is a grassy expanse surrounded by Cabbage Palms and Live Oaks, a good place to find Palm and Yellow-rump Warblers, Northern Cardinals, Northern Mockingbirds and Gray Catbirds. The eBird database lists 73 species observed at KPGP for all years. In January-March around 33 species have been reported each month. The number of birder reports, compared to Front Street Park statistics, suggests this is an under-birded location, given its diverse habitat. Another benefit of birding here is the pleasant breeze off the water and potential sightings of dolphins and manatees. Altogether it is a fine nature destination.



Yellow-rump by
Dee Fairbanks Simpson

Shady Claude Edge Front Street Park attracts more families and brown-bag lunchers. The two parks share many of the same bird species. Claude Edge has an ample number of picnic tables spaced around the park and benches in the shade. It has a waterfront walkway with great views. The park gets quite busy most weekends, as Melbourne hosts so many weekend events. Car and boat-trailer parking quickly fills up, so weekdays are a better choice if possible.

Now let's get back to that promised brunch, or possibly happy hour for afternoon birders. The historic district is less than half a mile away on foot or by car, and offers more scenery, including some spectacular murals. To get to New Haven Avenue, go past Hatt's Diving Headquarters (which has a mind-boggling inventory of dive equipment), and proceed along Melbourne Avenue past pleasure craft bobbing in their slips. Travel under the US 1 bridge, passing Crane Creek Promenade and the manatee observation area. Go under the blue railroad bridge and then take any number of side streets up to New Haven Avenue.

If you parked at KPGP, you are committed to exiting onto the Melbourne Causeway. There is a short cross-over opening to westbound lanes. For something less nerve-wracking, head east to make a U-turn shortly after the peak of the bridge. If you miss the U-turn, the next stop is Indialantic and the Atlantic beaches, which is not such a bad fate, is it?

Park Hours (check before you go):

- **Claude Edge Front Street Park** is open 6 am to 10 pm.
- **Kiwanis Park** at Geiger Point (it is gated) from 8 am-8 pm.
- **Easy driving option to both parks:** Avoid the traffic on U.S. 1 and 192 by taking Babcock Street to Melbourne Avenue and then go east, directly to Front Street.

Ecuador Magic Birding Circuit, 13 Years Later

Part 2: Tandayapa Lodge

By Matt Heyden

Now I'll tell you what I didn't tell you about getting to Tandayapa. In the 13 years since we have been here, Ecuador has endured a 7 year draught. What I didn't realize is that while Ecuador is an oil exporter, the country is more than 80% reliant on super clean hydroelectric. No water...no electric. These lodges were without electricity frequently 16 hours per day. Add in 4 years of COVID and almost no birders, and the challenges would have wiped out weaker families.



Our guide Luis, is actually Jorge Luis Cruz the 4th, the son of Dr. Cruz. While we were on route to Tandayapa, birding the abandoned mountain stone road, he revealed the above information and explained that due to the heavy rains, landslides are more numerous and problematic.

We all had a great day birding in the rain, enjoying the abandoned road for miles and miles.

Photo by Matt Heyden

Suddenly, a bus comes at us from the other direction. A bus employee is walking in front of the bus directing the driver exactly where to put the wheels to avoid the rock slope on the uphill side and the sheer drop off on the downhill side. The bus has to get past us. Jose spoke with the driver and learned that the paved road had just had a landslide, and traffic had to choose to wait for the landslide to be cleared or take a chance on this mountain crossing.

The bus is in our face as we back up and Jose finds a spot where he can put our van up on a rock ridge and the bus can sneak by; then the farm trucks appear, and pickup trucks with the workers in back. The other drivers are a little concerned, but not like I would be. No cell service, GPS, weather reports or radio.

At this age, I have learned many things. One of which is that if you have a vehicle, it isn't any good to anyone in a difficult situation without stuff. Even in this van, I have hoarded safe drinking water and enough snacks for everyone, just in case we have to spend the night in the van. And I'm armed with the best thing yet: a lifetime of very funny birding stories, the kind that no one wants told, and certainly not printed!

So, now get this. Eventually we get to a place where I can see the road on the other side of the steep valley. There is a debris field going down from the stone road; way, way down the cliff. Then I remembered it. All those years ago, a medium duty truck, fully loaded with non-perishables got too close to the edge and couldn't save itself. It went over the cliff and rolled on the way down dumping the contents. And there the truck sat, and would forever. I won't accept the darkness of the story. My version is that the occupants had 5 seconds to get out, and did just that. The truck that went off the cliff didn't burn and is now gone. It didn't burn because diesel fuel is much less explosive, and Ecuador is 90% diesel. The truck would have come up with a strong winch and many sections of cable. The contents still remain and will forever. Well, let's just say, I'm watching Jose like a hawk; every time he pulls one of these maneuvers to let traffic go by, it's us that are on the downhill side!

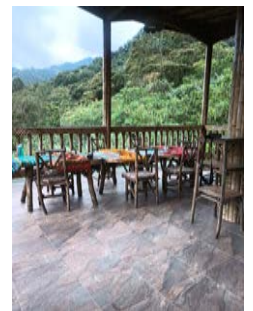


Photo by Matt Heyden

Eventually, we get to the end of this road adventure and we reach the lodge. Now, 13 years ago, there was no road to the lodge, so we had to walk a trail cut into the mountain side. A donkey was used to take the

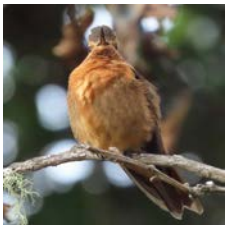
luggage up. No donkey this time, but another landslide had blocked the new access road, and climb on foot we must. Ah, but the luggage was there waiting for us!

Once again, I'm seeing the "magic" in the Magic Birding Circuit: you get what you pay for.

It took this second trip for me to realize some things. First of all, how does a family buy thousands of acres of pristine habitat? There is only 4 % of this left in the country. It's the condition of the land I'm talking about. It's steep, very, very steep, and of no value to anyone....but birders. It's can't be used for agriculture, so most may never have been logged.

We are also in the land of volcanoes, and there is one that is active again not far away. I also want to answer a question for a reader as to why on earth would we go to this altitude again when it's quite challenging. Simple. We are too old for the yellow fever vaccine. We have only birded the upper region of the Amazon, not the lower. That said, the family is currently building a birding lodge in the lower Amazon. Should we dare? Waiting for us is malaria, yellow fever, dengue, west Nile, chickungunya and even worse, leishmaniasis. At these higher elevations, there is none of that—just a lack of oxygen!

You know we saw hundreds and hundreds of new birds, and you know I'm not going to type them out. But, birds are altitude related. So here are just a few incredible birds found only in these upper elevations. I want you to look at them on the internet....you will be pleased, trust me.



Great Sapphire Wing, Shining Sunbeam, White bellied Wood Star, Sword billed Hummingbird, Giant Hummingbird, Mountain Velvetbreast, Tyrian Metaltail, Sparkling Violetear, and both Black tailed and Green Tailed Trainbearers. Take a few minutes to admire these, and remember we didn't have to kill ourselves to get very good looks.

Part 3 will be why it's so incredible to be able to stay at the botanical reserve at Tandayapa.

Shining Sunbeam photo by
Dee Fairbanks Simpson

Not Your Childhood Heroes: Comparing the Lorax, the Onceler, and Horton

By Heather Stapleton, Community Engagement Coordinator,
Indian River Lagoon National Estuary Program



I have read Dr. Seuss' The Lorax way more times than any grown adult should admit. Over the years, I've developed an untraditional take on the story - one that might surprise you. I don't see the Lorax as the celebrated good guy everyone loves, nor do I think the Onceler is a cartoonishly villainous bad guy. To me, they're more complicated.

Recently, I've been thinking about these two highly flawed characters alongside Horton from Horton Hears a Who. The contrasts have been fascinating.

In The Lorax, both the Lorax and the Onceler are passionate yet ultimately ineffective. The Lorax is deeply protective of the environment, but his abrasive, bossy demeanor alienates others, preventing meaningful change. He ultimately abandons the problem, leaving through a hole in the smog, failing to secure the forest's future.

Similarly, the Onceler demonstrates ambition and ingenuity and provides for his family, but his passion is self-serving, with little regard for environmental preservation. Even after a change of heart, he is paralyzed by worry, hoarding the last trufula seed rather than taking action, passing both the seed and the consequences of his choices to the next generation. His shame is evident as he recounts the story, showing only his arms and occasionally his eyes. Studies across psychology, sociology, and public health suggest that when one generation leaves unresolved social, economic, or environmental problems to the next, it can create significant stress for younger people. This stress is not only emotional, but also cognitive, financial, and even physiological.

For example, research on climate anxiety shows that many young people report feeling overwhelmed about inheriting environmental crises they did not create. A large international survey published in *The Lancet* found that a majority of young respondents felt frightened, sad, or powerless about climate change, with many expressing anger toward older generations for failing to act.

By contrast, Horton exemplifies proactive responsibility. In *Horton Hears a Who*, he responds to his own worry with patient, persistent action, using respectful language and advocacy to engage others.

The Lorax and Onceler communicate confrontationally, which diminishes their ability to persuade. In *The Lorax*, the word “please” is largely absent. The only instance of “please” in *The Lorax* occurs when the Onceler dismissively says, “Shut up if you please.”

Horton, however, deliberately uses “please” as part of his advocacy, saying things like “Speak up please” and “So please, as a favor to me, try not to disturb them.” This polite language reflects his recognition that persuasion requires engagement, empathy, and cooperation, enabling him to rally others and take meaningful action to protect the Whos.

Unlike the Lorax, who repeatedly claims to “speak for the trees” and positions himself as in charge, Horton empowers and supports rather than asserts authority. He persistently seeks to understand the Whos. He reassures them and encourages their agency, saying, “Don’t give up! I believe in you all!” In contrast, the Lorax sends his charges off with no real help, offering only vaguely dire warnings of an uncertain future.

Horton acts on his concern through perseverance, diplomacy, and tangible effort, ultimately succeeding in protecting the Whos and earning genuine pride in his accomplishments.

This comparison underscores a key distinction: the Lorax and the Onceler fail to translate concern into effective advocacy, while Horton demonstrates that respectful, persistent advocacy combined with action can achieve meaningful, responsible impact.