

The Limpkin

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



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Limpkin Autumn Edition

Dee Fairbanks Simpson, Editor

Welcome to the Autumn Limpkin! Thanks so much to all those who contributed to this edition. I hope everyone had a great summer, but I know I am looking forward to cooler weather and fall migration. We hope to see everyone on September 18 for our annual potluck and welcome back general meeting.

Featured articles this month are:

- Upcoming Space Coast Audubon Events
- The Save Our Indian River Lagoon Half-cent Sales Tax Initiative By Heather Elko
- Birds and Nature in My Corner of Quebec By Deborah Longman-Marien
- Book Review: The Feather Detective: Mystery, Mayhem, and the Magnificent Life of Roxie Laybourne By Heather Elko
- The Time is Now to be an Advocate for Nature By Heather Elko
- Ecuador Part 3 By Matt Heyden: Read the continuing adventures of Matt and Lora on the Magic Birding Circuit, 13 years later. In this installment: Tandayapa Botanical Reserve.

Upcoming Space Coast Audubon Events

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

All SCAS Monthly Meetings are held at: Rockledge Presbyterian Church, 921 Rockledge Dr, Rockledge, FL,

- **Weekly: Every Saturday at 9:00 a.m.:** Bird Walks at Sams House at Pine Island, 6195 N Tropical Trail, Merritt Island, FL, US
- **Fri, September 18, 6:30 PM EST:** SCAS Monthly Meeting: Annual Welcome Back Potluck.
- **Fri, October 16, 6:30 PM EST:** SCAS Monthly Meeting: Topic TBA.
- **Mon, October 19 - Sat, Oct 31:** Early voting for US General Election. Remember to vote for protection of wildlife and our environment.
- **Tues, November 3:** US General Election. Remember to vote for protection of wildlife and our environment.
- **Fri, Nov 20, 6:30 PM EST:** Monthly Meeting: The Road to Recovery: 25 years of Red-cockaded Woodpecker Management.
- **Fri, December 18, 6:30 PM EST:** SCAS Monthly Meeting: Annual Chips, Chirps, Cheer and Chocolate
- **Sat, December 19 :** Cocoa Christmas Bird Count
- **Mon, December 21:** MINWR Christmas Bird Count
- **Sat, January 2, 2027:** South Brevard Christmas Bird Count
- **Fri, January 15, 6:30 PM EST:** SCAS Monthly Meeting: Topic TBA.
- **Wed, January 20-Sun January 24:** Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival

- **Fri, February 19, 6:30 PM EST:** SCAS Monthly Meeting: Topic TBA.
- **Fri, March 19, 6:30 PM EST:** SCAS Monthly Meeting: Topic TBA.
- **Fri, April 16, 6:30 PM EST:** SCAS Monthly Meeting: Topic TBA.

The Save Our Indian River Lagoon Half-cent Sales Tax Initiative

Vote Yes to keep the momentum going
By Heather Elko

On this year's November ballot will be an initiative to renew the Indian River Lagoon half-cent sales tax. The tax was approved in 2016 by nearly two-thirds of voters. We now have the opportunity to extend it for another 10 years and build on the progress that has been achieved.

Since 2016, the Save Our Indian River Lagoon (SOIRL) Program has implemented hundreds of infrastructure, dredging, and restoration projects to reduce nutrient pollution and reverse the decline of the estuary. These efforts have resulted in

- **Cleaner Water:** Cutting down on excess nitrogen and phosphorus to stop toxic algae blooms.
- **Habitat Recovery:** Rebuilding nurseries for marine life by replanting seagrass, mangroves, and salt marshes
- **Natural Filtering:** Restoring oyster reefs and populations of clams, thus reviving biological water filtration.
- **Wildlife Protection:** Cleaner ecosystems safeguard threatened species like manatees, sea turtles, and wading birds.
- **Better Recreation:** Cleaner waters improve conditions for fishing, boating, kayaking, and eco-tourism.
- **Shoreline Resilience:** Restored wetlands and living shorelines absorb wave energy and reduce property damage during storms.

So often the word "tax" raises anxiety levels. However, this half-penny sales tax applies to all who spend in Brevard. Visitors who come here to enjoy water recreation, nature appreciation, and dining at waterfront restaurants, will also contribute to the Lagoon's improvement.

Many long-time residents are well aware of the importance of funding Lagoon restoration. Now we need to inform new residents and ask them to support the cause. In the past 10 years Brevard has added over 90,000 new residents, a 15% population increase since the last time this question was on the ballot.

Here is the ballot language:

Shall Brevard County renew the existing Save Our Indian River Lagoon half-cent sales tax for ten years, and require deposit of all revenue to a trust fund solely for such purposes, with continued citizen committee oversight and annual independent audits?

To persuade your neighbors and friends to support the half-cent tax initiative, you might share this web page, "Why the Indian River Lagoon Matters to All of Us" (<https://www.lagoonloyal.com/indian-river-lagoon>)

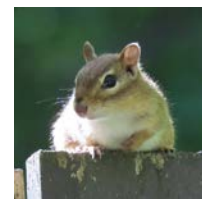
Birds and Nature in My Corner of Quebec

By Deborah Longman-Marien

It is hot in Florida in the summer. For thirty plus years I have spent part of the summer, and sometimes a week or two in winter in the Upper Laurentian Mountains of Quebec, Canada. These are one of the oldest mountain regions of the earth and are located north of the St. Lawrence River. The area is teeming with large and small lakes and with wildlife.

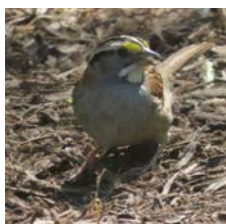
We spend our summer at a cabin on a large lake which is popular for kayaking, pontoon boats, canoes and small motorboats and fishing for lake trout, pike, bass, walleye, and musky. The mixed forest around the lake is primarily white and yellow birch, balsam fir, cedar, sugar maple and others.

There are animals within the forest commonly seen such as deer, squirrels, porcupines, chipmunks, and raccoons on the bird feeders. Other animals are talked about and hints are left behind but are rarely seen. Neighbors have seen bears and moose. We weren't there at the right time. In laws have heard wolves howling in winter and we did see traces of a deer eaten by probably wolves. We have seen deer tracks, some moose tracks, as well as bear and lynx tracks on walks further into the forest. I have seen foxes and deer on my walks and a mink near the dock one year. Just today my husband saw a deer followed by a coyote, while I was looking the other direction. Beavers are a common sight if you kayak or canoe in the evening.



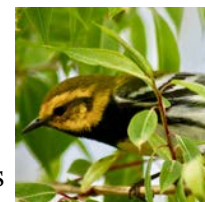
Eastern Chipmunk

Over the years I have seen or heard some birds regularly and others only once. The earlier you come in the spring, the more bird songs you hear. Of course, the earlier you come, the more bugs you encounter, too. Commonly heard around my cabin each year are the ovenbird, the veery, the hermit thrush, the white throated sparrow, the winter wren, the red eyed vireo as well as blue jays, robins, chickadees and ruby throated hummingbirds fighting at the feeder. We have heard barred owls many years. I have come later in the summer the last few years and have not heard as many songs. Of course, the nighttime sound I love is that of the common loon on the lake. At this time of year some are beginning to gather for migration. I saw 17 together yesterday in front of our dock.



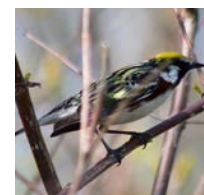
White-throated Sparrow

The warblers I have seen and heard most frequently in and around our cabin have been the ovenbird, the black throated green, the magnolia warbler, the yellow rumped and the black and white. These are accompanied by the red eyed vireos and the blue headed vireo and both the red breasted and the white breasted nuthatch and the brown creeper. Goldfinch, purple finch and chickadees are pretty regular. I have seen both downy and hairy woodpeckers as well as the pileated woodpecker right around our cabin. One year a phoebe nested above our basement door. I still see them but they don't nest there anymore. Some years there are rose breasted grosbeaks in numbers.



Black-throated Green

On walks down the forested gravel road I have encountered the black throated blue, the blackburnian warbler, near the stream northern waterthrush, and the chestnut sided warbler in more open areas. I have only seen a Canada warbler once, feeding in some branches near the lake while I kayaked by. There are probably many others I have missed but they feed in the treetops so high, I cannot make them out. I need better binoculars.



Chestnut-sided

On the water there are always one or two common loons in front of our dock. The smaller bays have black ducks and sometimes mallards. Usually there are common mergansers with their chicks on the lake. I have not seen one this year.

We have noticed in the last few years more wild turkeys. My spouse says there used to be none north of the Saint Lawrence River. Driving to town for groceries is a chance to see birds of the open. There are bluebirds in the little village since there are farm flies around. We tried putting nest boxes up for them but they did not do well due to sports activity nearby. One year I saw bobolinks in the farm fields but they disappeared when the farmer mowed his crop. I would see kestrels on the wires near farm fields and turkey vultures over the fields.

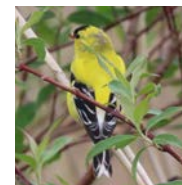
As for raptors, there was one year there were bald eagles, but there have never been osprey here. There have been broad winged and sharp shinned hawks, but most raptors swoop in so fast I can't ID them.

Special one-time birds for me here have been

- Black billed cuckoo; I heard but never saw one.
- An evening grosbeak that my neighbor and I watched together at our feeders
- The scarlet tanager I saw out my front window one morning.
- One summer we took the boat into the marshy end of the lake and approached an American bittern, who made his pumping sound several evenings in a row at dusk.

Winter visits yield fewer birds but sometimes interesting ones. Ravens are always making their raucous calls above the trees. I saw a ruffed grouse perched high in the snowy branches one winter day. We've had common redpolls and pine siskins at the feeder in winter amongst the regular chickadees and goldfinches.

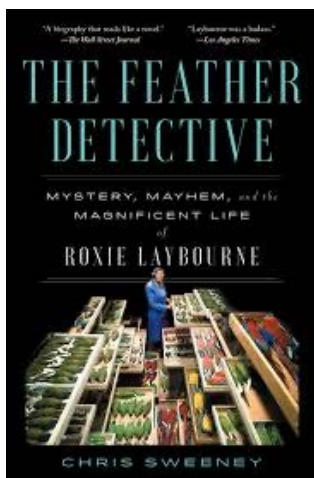
There may not be tropical forests here, but there are many interesting birds to see here and in other regions of Quebec. It is always interesting to come back.



Goldfinch

Book Review: The Feather Detective: Mystery, Mayhem, and the Magnificent Life of Roxie Laybourne

Review By Heather Elko



Last fall, facing a two-day drive to visit family, I selected what sounded like an interesting audiobook that could keep me awake behind the wheel. Little did I know, it would keep me awake long after the trip was over. The Feather Detective is a feast for curious minds, including birders and naturalists, aviation buffs, fans of true crime, and anyone interested in the Smithsonian Institution's Natural History Museum as a resource for all of the above.

As the title suggests, the book is a biography of a woman who worked behind the scenes at the Department of Natural History starting in the 1940s, a time when women scientists could do meaningful work, but preferably when they were seen and not heard. Her self-motivated research led her to breaking trail in what would become an entirely new field, feather forensics, and culminated in the 1990s with her passion to mentor promising successors. But the story of Roxie Laybourne's career is also a central point from which author Chris Sweeney ranges out to elaborate on developments in science, technology, and natural history in the mid-Twentieth Century. It is rich with interesting facts about the workings of museums and scientific research, and the relationships of Federal agencies and academic entities who participate in and benefit from deep-dive ornithology.

In 1944 Laybourne started out as a taxidermist in the Division of Birds. Initially her presence was grudgingly accepted by the men who worked there, but the relationship warmed as they all were joined in a major task: to clean up the disorganized taxidermy collection and repair the specimens that had piled up by the thousands. The descriptions of drawers and boxes full of bird skins, many in atrocious states of deterioration, are quite amusing. As WWII veterans returned home with hiring preference, Roxie segued by invitation into working for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which operated a lab within the Museum of Natural History. As to the question of who she worked for, well, as we say today, "It's complicated." Her lab remained under Smithsonian jurisdiction, and she weathered a progression of bureaucrats who came and went, each issuing new decrees. Through it all, her scientist's focus never wavered, supported by people in the system who relied on her work.

Roxie's dedicated microscope research over many years led to a signature achievement: a method to discern minute differences in barbules, the tiniest of feather features that can distinguish one bird species from

another. This knowledge assisted the FAA's efforts to mitigate bird strikes as a cause of plane crashes. The success of FBI investigations was enhanced with the ability to confidently introduce feathers as crime scene evidence (think feather pillows and down jackets). This also applied to Fish and Wildlife's investigations of wildlife crime.

Two particular airplane crashes, both attributable to bird strikes, became a turning point for modern aeronautical design and for Roxie's career. An Eastern Airlines Lockheed Electra crash in 1960 was determined to be caused by a massive flock of European starlings. In 1962 a United Airlines Vickers Viscount crashed, where "ducks and geese" were reported to be present around the airfield. Those events galvanized the FAA and regulators to raise airplane design standards to anticipate the outcomes of impacts with particular species of birds. Roxie's knowledge of the physical attributes of various species, and her ability to analyze feather parts from chewed-up avian remains in plane engines, came into play. In the 1980s, as recounted in the chapter "The Loon and the Learjet," Roxie was called on to testify in a hard-fought lawsuit. The debated assumptions about loons in this chapter are an opportunity for knowledgeable readers to apply their own loon knowledge before the denouement. Similarly, anecdotes throughout the book about specific species are sure to interest birders.

As Roxie perfected her specialty of feather ID and as her expertise became recognized, she was asked to serve as a witness at criminal trials, even though she "never intended or expected to be working at the intersection of ornithology and homicide." She was able to offload that undesirable work by buttonholing a young FBI agent whom she trained in bird skinning and feather ID; thus, she would never again have to attend hearings where heinous murders were described in detail. Fish and Wildlife was much more to her liking. The agency's pursuit of criminals who broke endangered species laws once led her, at the age of 77, to go on a stake-out on a private hunting preserve in Virginia, to analyze on site the disintegrating raptor carcasses pulled out of a "kill pit." Her assistance helped to convict a wealthy landowner who ordered the slaughter of hawks and owls in order to protect his hunting stock of rare imported pheasants.

During her early career Roxie's personal life followed its own course, going from a first marriage to an alcoholic husband, to a second, happy marriage, and then widowhood and raising two sons. In a regretful admission shared later in life about her parenting style, she acknowledged her work had always come first. She was a true character, with a throaty North Carolina accent, determined to get her way, and under the radar if necessary. She was a stern taskmaster in the popular bird skinning workshops for ornithology students that she taught at the Museum. She had a need for speed, owning a series of sports cars in which she happily availed herself of the curving roads around Manassas, Virginia, to the consternation of her passengers.

Imagine the frustration of listening to the audio version of *The Feather Detective* at 70 mph, with no chance to scrawl a note or turn down a page corner to revisit later! This clearly is a book that demands being held in one's hands to savor, which of course I did as soon as I got home. The extensive research that went into the

About the Author, Chris Sweeney

By Heather Elko

Chris Sweeney has published feature articles, many with a birds and conservation angle, in Audubon Magazine, The Guardian, Popular Science, and Wired among others. *The Feather Detective* is his first book.

How did Sweeney come up with the idea for telling Roxie Laybourne's story? According to interviews he has granted, her name surfaced a couple times when he talked with sources about other articles he was writing. The first mention was in a 2015 meeting with Dr. Pepper Trail, a forensic ornithologist at the National Fish and Wildlife Forensics Laboratory. A few years later Sweeney met with Dr. Carla Dove, currently Program Manager at the Feather Identification Lab of the National Museum of Natural History. In that conversation he learned that Dove was one of Roxie's mentees. Sweeney was intrigued and soon after wrote "The Remarkable Life of Roxie Laybourne," published in the October 2020 issue of Audubon Magazine.

Without Sweeney's investigative energy it is likely that Roxie's career might never have received the attention it deserves. Other than an obituary in The New York Times, nothing had been written about her, and the number of people aware of her important work diminished with time.

I posed two questions to him, which he kindly and promptly answered in an email. One, how did he decide to go from the article to writing an entire book? His answer: as soon as the article came out, several agents contacted him to ask about the possibility of a book. He liked the idea and soon got started. Secondly, how about a movie? The challenges for women scientists in not-too-distant times is certainly of interest, as evidenced most recently by the success of *Hidden Figures*. Furthermore, some of the characters who populate the book almost beg to be depicted in film. And finally, audiences love crime-solving; more so with airplane crashes in the background. To this question Sweeney was open, enough to make me hope that one day Roxie's story might be seen on screen.

To access Chris Sweeney's articles published in Audubon Magazine, go to this website: <https://www.audubon.org/people/chris-sweeney>

project is supported by a 28-page appendix of notes. For those who prefer audiobooks, the narration by voice actor Sierra Prasada is spot on. In Brevard County, and probably many other libraries no matter where you live, The Feather Detective in digital form is free to borrow via the Libby app.

The Time is Now to be an Advocate for Nature

By Heather Elko

(Note: Ideas here are adapted from The Advocate, a publication of the National Audubon Society.)

Today we face a growing population, ever more land under development, and the expansion of commercial activities that can affect our Indian River Lagoon. It is more urgent than ever that we be engaged. Here are some ways we can advocate for nature:

- Contact local elected officials when environmental-related issues are on the agenda. Your pro-bird and pro-conservation contact will remind them that voters care about environmental issues. Brief emails, letters, and/or phone calls are important.
- Let them know how the issue affects you personally. Your message may start out something like this: “As a life-long birder, I urge you to....”
- The voices of seasonal residents, who comprise a significant number of our membership, also are needed!
- Pro-tip. A phone call to a Commissioner's office can be more effective than an email. Occasionally you will reach the commissioner, but more likely an aide will answer, and they tally up the calls. If you are a frequent caller, you will get to know the staff member, which can be helpful.
- You don't have to be an expert--just speak from the heart. Your advocacy will have an impact.
- Monitor what's going on with birds and conservation in our area
- Keep up with publications like the weekly Hometown News and daily Florida Today
- Follow online social networking sites that serve neighborhoods or city interests
- Join online groups with focused conservation interests such as birds, pollinators, and native plants
- Speak out publicly
- Write an opinion column or a letter to the editor (LTE)
- Call in to talk shows
- Attend city council and county commission meetings. Sign up for the comment period (usually limited to 2-3 minutes per speaker).
- Your presence in the audience in a conservation-themed tee shirt also is a form of speaking.
- Share your experiences and findings with Space Coast Audubon members
- Come at the beginning of our monthly meetings to share in Birder Chat
- Send an email to our Board, letting them know of your activities. Contact them at info@spacecoastaudubon.org
- Write an article about your experiences for our quarterly, The Limpkin.

Ecuador Part 3: Tandayapa

By Matt Heyden

OK, you know we made it to Tandayapa Botanical Reserve. Some quick observations. Of the 4 lodges we will be traveling between, the family ([see Part 1 of this story for details of the family](#)) built 3 of them, with a fourth in the works. It takes years to build one for many reasons.

In the case of Tandayapa, the design was what a birding family would build. In the middle of nowhere, there is no fire protection, and no city water. The kitchen is attached to a fabulous free standing dining room with just a massive roof overlooking a huge forested valley. The dining room is open on 3 sides with every kind of wildlife feeder imaginable. When these dining room buildings are constructed, they are on pedestals above a

steep drop off. The feeders are mounted on poles that the employees will climb at 6am to load with bananas, humming bird feeders, and some seeds.

The rooms are scattered around the property, and you have no idea where the other birders are staying, and they have no idea where you are. There is no heat nor air conditioning. There are screened openings at the top of the walls for constant fresh air.

On the Magic Birding Circuit, there are no spiders in the beds, and no biting ants in the mattresses. The mattresses are incredible as are the linens, and the fabrics for the drapes and bed spreads are woven Ecuadorian masterpieces. But



This is what roads look like after a small landslide is cleared.

you won't care because you will be dead in the bed at 8 to be up gunning and running at 6. Bamboo grows easily in South America, and much of these lodges appears to be built with it as the structure. Now imagine building a complex like this....with not being able to have a truck get close enough to unload building materials. Everything has to be carried or put in a wheel barrow.

Now add MILES of trails, cut into the side of the mountain, with thousands of stairs. Throw in landslides, small, medium and large, and the staff has to deal with it. In one case, our handsome, even elegant dining attendant is ahead of us with a huge machete, cutting fallen trees that are blocking our path. After I see this man hacking trees to death, I think about the way he looks at me when I insist on my coffee black... perhaps I'll just let him put the HOT milk in! Never underestimate a dining room attendant -THEY CAN KILL YOU!

The family has supporting families that live on these lodge properties. They want our visit PERFECT in every way.

Now, I'm going to give you just a few birds to look up. These are visible from the dining room, pretty much all day. If you never left the dining room lodge, it would be better birding than some trips. A special note. Asa Wright in Trinidad is wheel chair friendly. None of these properties are as you are always going up or down stairs. Go now, while you can.

These are birds you see in your face from the dining room: Silver Throated Tanager, Black Capped Tanager, Golden Tanager, Flame Faced Tanager, Golden Naped Tanager, White Winged Tanager, Rufous Motmot, and Red Headed Barbet. We will see hundreds of birds while here, but I want you to see a SMALL sample of what will be around the dining room building.

No sense reading further until you look these incredible birds up. DO IT!

Onward. On the first morning, I'm up at 5:30 and heading in the darkness up to the dining room; breakfast won't be until 8, and they want an adventure at 6:30. I want coffee.

The staff is expecting me, sees me... and the coffee is magically ready in the darkness. Minutes later our group is assembled to go to the moth trap. Then I remembered it; this is *so cool*. In the middle of nowhere, the lack of pesticides allow all the insects to live naturally. ALL of them! The moths are gorgeous, and huge. A moth trap is a white sheet with a rain roof above it, placed out in the woods with a light above it. All night long the moths are attracted to the light and rest on the sheet. In the darkness, we marveled at the beautiful moths and the colors, but dawn was coming. Oh NO!

Luis placed us all in a hidden blind so we could watch as the most elusive birds arrived to admire the moths - that's what they did - use your imagination... birds and moths.

I love 6,000 feet. I can breathe better, and there are no mosquitoes. It's cold, but we have parkas.



The dining room is surrounded by bird feeders



The dining room, set up for breakfast. All the land you see down into the valley is owned by the family.