

Spreading Our Wings

Wingspan

St. Petersburg Audubon Society

Fall, 2020

VOTE



WINGSPAN

The St. Petersburg Audubon Society
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Welcome New Members

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Photo Credits

Macaulay Library for the following:

- Birds used in Taking back Missed Magical Migration Moments
- Birds used in 'P' and 'C' Word Birds Lodge Formal Complaint
- Flock of Red Knots on the back page

The Ft. DeSoto's tollbooth is found at Pinellas County's website

Wingspan mailer - www.freepik.com/photos/background

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Annual Membership

Student.....	\$10
Individual.....	\$20
Family.....	\$25
Patron.....	\$75



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From the Editor

16 GLORIOUS PAGES. THE 'P-WORD' OR 'C-WORD' NOT IN SIGHT

A key strategy in the writing biz, is taking the top of mind news story, the one everyone's talking about, and shoehorn it into your topic. No matter how far the stretch, writers get the story of the day into their ads, editorials and stories.

ENOUGH!

For this issue, I'm going in the totally opposite direction. Guaranteed, you won't see ANYTHING about the topic deluging our TV's and every other form of media imaginable. I'm not even using the words in the title. Why?

You need a break – from endless expounding by politicians, pundits and physicians. Whether well-meaning or not – respite is in order.

BIRDS. THE IDEAL ANTIDOTE



Birds bring us joy, birds connect us with nature, birds get us outside. Ft. DeSoto was closed this spring, let's remember the birds from spring times past. We've been *sheltering in place* a good portion of the year, let's celebrate the Mockingbirds,

Blue Jays and others who kept us sane during our short trips outside.

Let's not forget the magnificence of our shorebirds – we may have missed them live, there's a rookery full of memories inside.

FAST. UNCHALLENGING. FUN

It's fast and fun. No challenges, no news about the Migratory Bird Treaty and Endangered Species Acts or Black Lives Matter. Not because they aren't important, *but because you are too*. In another issue, on another day. For this issue, you've earned a break.

WELL...ALMOST NO CHALLENGES

Looking at the cover, you can guess the one exception. VOTING. Important enough to break from my 'no challenge, let's have fun' theme.

Personally, I remember elections back to Lyndon Johnson vs. Barry Goldwater in 1964. Every election I've heard candidates, party hacks and others prattle on about, "This is the most important election...get out and vote." Only now they're right – **THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ELECTION IN OUR LIFETIME.**



Arguably, the most important in the history of the republic.

So, one serious page on voting...complete with voting information.

FINAL THOUGHTS

2020 has been a rough year for everyone, and we're not done yet. Take a few minutes to enjoy and remember these marvelous creatures we don't spend enough time looking at.



Please stay safe and enjoy!



TAKING BACK MISSED MAGICAL MIGRATION MOMENTS



April and spring migration – a self-induced mayhem. Dirty laundry overflows the hamper, swallowing the laundry room...email suffering the same fate. Carefully guarded habits, designed to keep life sane, lying on the floor as you dash out, binoculars in one hand, camera in the other.

Life in the field is at Defcon 1, senses jammed into overdrive, the fiber of every nerve attuned to the slightest leaf rustle, twig crunch, and wing flutter. Squeezing every last second into the day's warblers, tanagers and flycatchers. If you don't collapse from exhaustion – you're not doing it right.

Come May, SD-cards overflowing, climbing catch-up mountain from the birding bacchanal. Ft. DeSoto is arguably the best spot in Florida to join the migration frenzy. Living so close, it's easy to take for granted. Being locked down this spring – **I MISS THE HECK OUT OF IT.**

To find a reason for this craziness, look no further than these pictures.

It's easy to understand why there are over 40-million birders in the US alone, vests, funny hats and binoculars...gleefully pointing at bush and tree.

To the onlooker, the door to the insane asylum was left open. As an insider, heart-racing excitement.

Freshly feathered, equally exhausted avian arrivals finishing a 550-mile **fly or die** trip across the Gulf of Mexico rest and fuel up.

Driven by instinct and hormones back up north to mate and fledge the next generation.

They are who we gladly sacrifice our sanity for every April.



'MIGRATION BIRDING' HEARTRATE



The flagpole is the visual wakeup call. Dreamlike anticipation erased by the need for immediate decisions:

- Which spot first?
- What was on eBird last night?
- What feels lucky?

Keep your head on a swivel, scan the phone wires for the odd Summer Tanager or Scissortail Flycatcher. Not often, but it's happened. Cars grouped along the road where they shouldn't be...looking for birders can be as productive as looking for birds.

The jump from 'resting heartrate' to 'migration birding heartrate' is complete in the 1/2 mile from the toll booth to the 'T' turn.



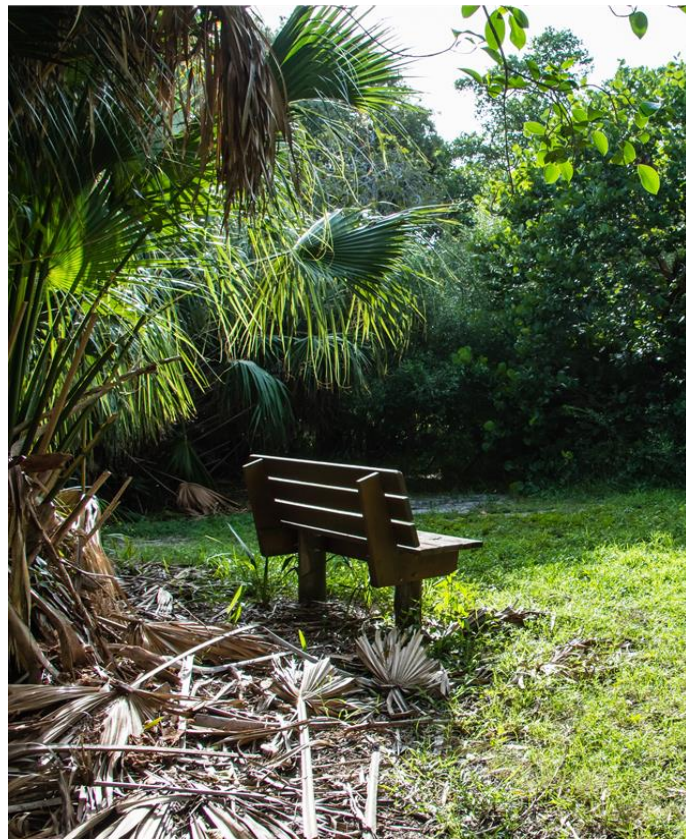
A CANDY STORE OF BIRDS

If there's a **go to** or a **go back to** place, it's the mulberry trees at the ranger's quarters. Morning can turn to afternoon in a heartbeat. It even has its own e-Bird acronym...MTA

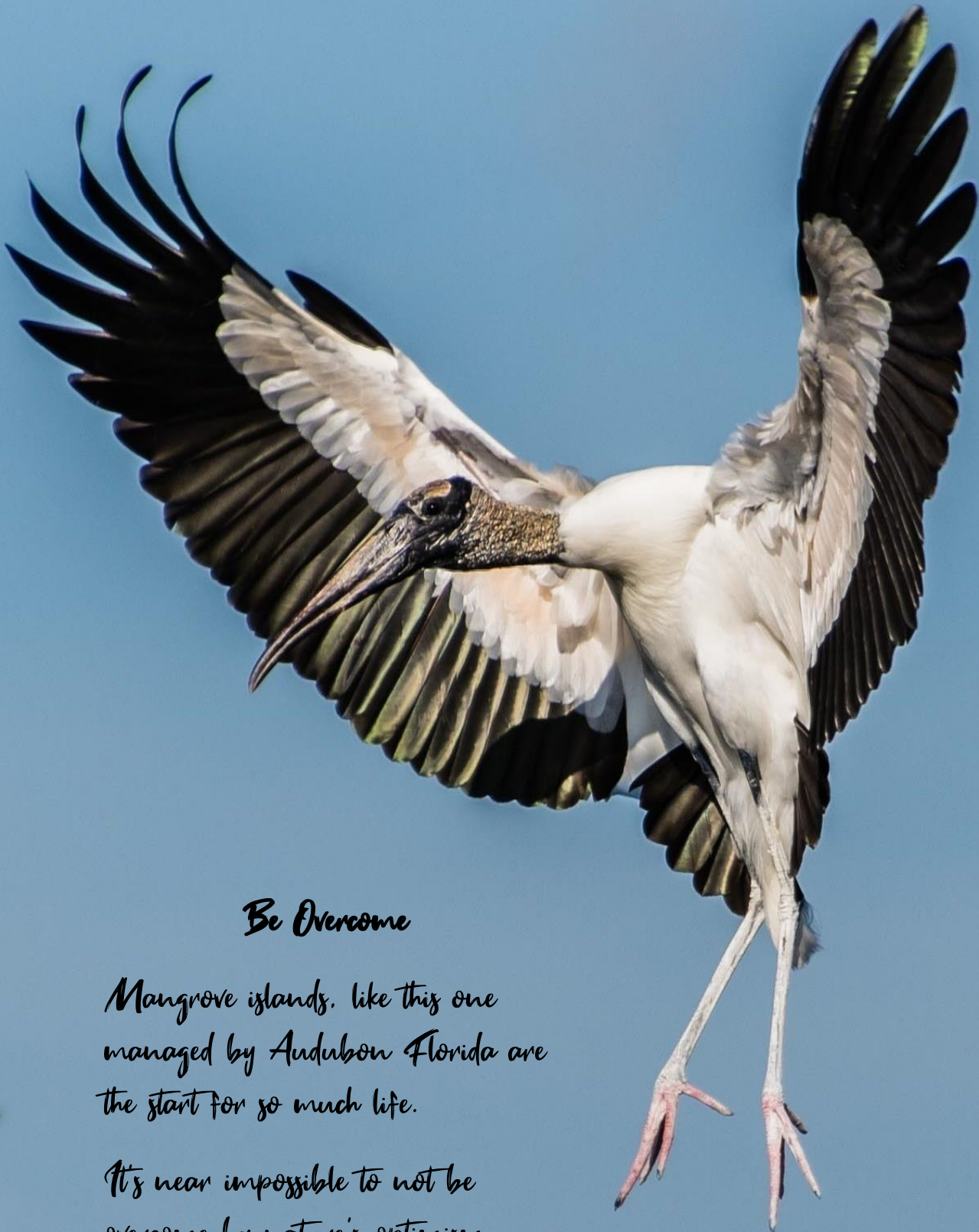
It's all Ft. DeSoto's habitats compressed into one. High oak canopies, low trees with brush, shoreline, beach scrub, easy walking trails and of course, the Mulberry Trees. For migrating birds an easy meal isn't a nicety, it's a necessity.

A kid in a candy store experience for birders. Dazzling yellows, stunning reds, vibrant blues, the awe-inspiring wonderment of witnessing one of nature's great rituals unfold in front of you.

CONTINUES ON PAGE 10



birds with few words



Be Overcome

Mangrove islands, like this one managed by Audubon Florida are the start for so much life.

It's near impossible to not be overcome by nature's optimism.







OVER 700,000 WING-FLAPS!

The cross-gulf journey is an unforgiving 550 miles. No food, no water, no stops. Just weather. A warbler is roughly the weight of a nickel at the start of their journey. At 4-feet per flap of its wings, the trip is about 715,000 flaps, arriving about the weight of a dime.

Most 'water features' are decorative – designed for humans. This fountain is practical and *bird focused*, providing birds the water they desperately need. Humans are along for the ride – getting one of the greatest shows on earth.

The fountain remembers Larry Hopkins, a friend of birds, Ft. DeSoto and St. Pete Audubon.



LANDFALL!

Landing a few yards from the gulf, body fat depleted and plain flapped-out, arriving migrants are in survival mode. Staggering like tipsy wedding guests in the field, foraging in the East Beach grass and oblivious to humans.

Stronger the next day, more flight and jumping between branches, still slower.

Day-3, full recovery. They'll be gone with the next good wind. Birds on caffeine.

Their perilous journey behind them, it's back to the business of getting north, finding mates and birthing the next generation. No looking back.



SHOREBIRDS' PARALLEL UNIVERSE



Shorebirds have a different vibe. East Beach Turnaround flows with a rhythm of a beach town after the tourists left.

If songbirds are teenagers getting ready for a hot Saturday night, shorebirds are vacationers on the last day. Still on *island time* but getting ready to exit.

Places like Hudson Bay are their destinations for summer mating mayhem. Ft. DeSoto is their vacation spot. Not unlike us, they are wearing old plumage, the sweat-pants of birddom.

Despite the laid-back vibe, being a bird is an industrious occupation. They may be at water's edge; but running down their next meal...no poolside service.



NO SPOT UNEXPLORED

Migration mania can erupt at any moment. Some days are wall-to-wall action from dawn 'til dusk. Others hyper in the early morning a late morning slowdown, a pick-up mid-afternoon. No schedule, no control just birding.

Senses are attuned even during slow times. Leaf rustle flashes in the corner of your eye. A swish above your head. **GAME ON!**

The proven spots go dry, afterthoughts produce. Discovery is part of the excitement.

Every birder has their own routine they trust and improve. 'The Fort' is rarely a starting point, but equally rarely missed.

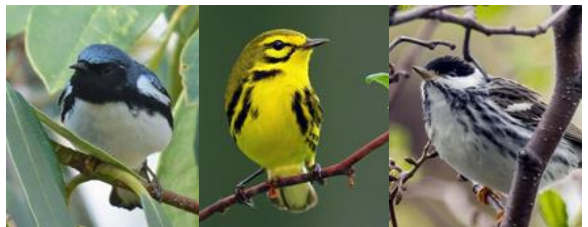
Compressing a season's birding into a month...no spot is left unexplored.



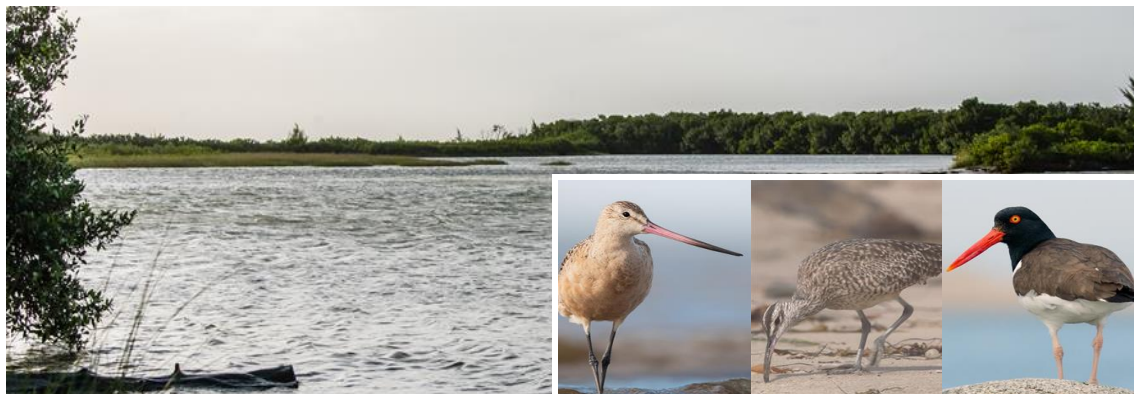


LAND. FEED UP. FLY NORTH

Migration's insatiable drive eclipses food for the now-revived travelers. Foraging, once languid, is energetic. They are feeding up and looking for a favorable wind to resume the trek. Their feeding area expands to the entire park. North Beach's mature oaks are full of high protein insects and grubs to fortify them for the upcoming trip.



The shorebirds' parallel universe has a shallow bay with sandbars for wading birds. Migrant godwits or whimbrels prepare to return north, locals like Reddish Egrets and Oystercatchers escape crowds and surf, feeding in the relative calm.



NO CARS - JUST WOODS...AND BIRDS

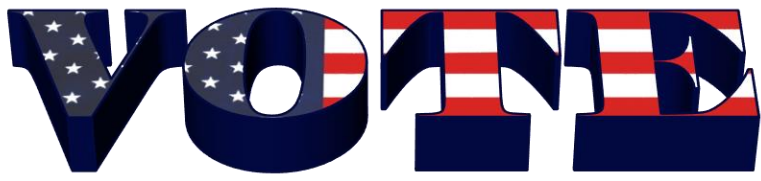


Arrowhead is the best place in the county to satisfy a longing for 'the woods'. No cars whizzing by, no condos peering through the understory, no roofers banging. **100% woods filling your senses.** Mixed oak, and pine. Un-paved trails, an occasional trail marker. **And birds.**

Flashes of color, leaf litter rattling a break in the greenery. Remember to look deep...use your entire field of vision. You'll be rewarded. One of the best birders I know sees more than others because she scans 50-150' distances as closely as everyone else scans 15-50'. Birds at this distance don't consider birders a threat - no matter what your hat looks like!

FINAL NOTE

Ft. DeSoto is so close it can be taken for granted. This year's closing was a reminder of how much we have. Hopefully, it was a one-time event. On the surface, an article about 'what we didn't do' this spring seemed like a simple idea. It wasn't. The words, images and names are triggers, hooks to catch memories in your mind, not mine. Despite best efforts, writing about spring migration is a poor substitute for experiencing spring migration. **Here's to 2021!**



STARE DOWN YOUR CONSCIENCE

FLORIDA...KING OF SWING – STATES. NOT DANCE OR 40'S MUSIC

Every election in modern times starts with the populace approximately 40% 'Red' 40% 'Blue'. About 10-months and \$4-5 Billion of advertising later (for both Republican and Democrat, Presidential race only), the country is roughly 40% 'Red' 40% 'Blue'. **The Undecided 20% voting in swing states determine the next 4-years...making Florida, the 'KING OF SWING' [States]. If you ever had the slightest thought your vote is not important...think again.**

Both Democrats and Republicans are urging their bases to 'get out and vote'. Probably the only thing they agree on. To everyone's point – 2020 is a pivotal election. Not just for the Presidency, the 'down ballot' races from Senator to dog catcher are worthy of your attention. Especially, if you care about birds. Most 'habitat decisions' are local. Your vote speaks for the birds. National Audubon's CEO David Yarnold is right in there urging members to vote and repeating 2020 is a pivotal election.

To sum it up – important election, you live in a key state. Not voting, not an option.

NO CANDIDATE HAS THIS ELECTION 'IN THE BAG'

From primary season, through the conventions and into the home stretch run, both parties introduce their candidates as, 'the next President of the United States'. What else would they say?

To add confusion, there's a poll a day or more, and if you're on the receiving end of \$4-5 Billion of advertising, making it a tight race filled with platitudes like, 'slipping in the polls, but coming back', or 'not an insurmountable lead' will clog our media and drain our spirit. Go back to where we started, roughly 40% 'Red' 40% 'Blue', the race is going to be tight. Especially if you're a 'King of Swing' Florida voter.

Neither candidate can afford a moment's rest, neither candidate has this 'in the bag'. And because 2020 is a pivotal election, you must get out and vote. **Not voting, not an option.**

WILL ANYTHING REALLY CHANGE?

Looking at the entire circus, which is the US elections, makes me wonder if it's worth my time. "Why bother?" might well be my question. Not an unreasonable question either. Same if I was concerned about voter suppression threats. In all cases, an informed vote is the most powerful tool you have...regardless if you're 24 or 64, regardless of your color, gender or origin.

Voting doesn't guarantee change, but infinitely more than if you don't.

WHO DO YOU VOTE FOR? TAKE THESE TESTS

Like National Audubon, we are a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit and cannot recommend candidates.

Instead, here are a few 'tests' I've come across this election season. They're relevant, directed at the most important time in the voting process – **when you're alone with your ballot, staring at it, you're staring your conscience in the face.**

TEST #1 - PROJECT FORWARD AND LOOK BACK

Project yourself voting 4-years from now. 2024. Where will you and your friends be as it relates to healthcare? If you're older, you think about this. A LOT. What if you or a loved one has a pre-existing condition?

Where will you, your children or grandchildren be as it relates to opportunity?

If you go overseas or have family who travels how will it be to be an American?

How about wildlife in general, particularly birds? ScienceMag.org released a study in late 2019 showing North America has 3-Billion less birds than 1970. Audubon's study identified 389 species threatened with extinction.

Look back, was your 2020 decision a good one? Would you feel good discussing this with your grandchildren?

TEST #2 - WOULD YOU HIRE THEM?

Think about if you were hiring the candidate to paint your house. Or a renovation. Would you feel comfortable? Confident? **Having misgivings – you know what to do.**

VOTING IN PINELLAS AND OUT OF STATE...ACT EARLY AND KNOW NOW

There's no shortage of information, I've found these useful and easy to navigate...
In Pinellas – www.votepinellas.com is the official site, also <https://vote.lwvspa.org>
All states – www.betterknowaballot.com, www.vote.org and www.vote.gov



SEEING 'LOCALS' WITH NEW EYES

It's easy to be swept away by Spring Migration's frenetic excitement. Flashy colors, huge flocks with the 'days left' clock ticking in the back of your head. Rushing to get going, rushing to catch the rarity, rushing to your 12:30 meeting you should have left for three warblers ago.



In all the rushing, you rushed past, Blue Jays birthing another generation.



The knocking sound you heard getting into the car – a Red-bellied having breakfast.



A Cardinal in the bush. He was not just a Cardinal.



This year, beauty obscured by familiarity leaps forward. A Red-belly is striking, so is a Blue Jay. Worth second looks.



Gallinules tending their chicks. Binos stay in the bag. More like bird observation than identification. Bird observation is calmer, a deeper appreciation, yet equally seductive. Not a replacement, an added dimension.



2020 was the year to be grateful for the magnificent Mockingbird and fabulous Flicker.



Come 2021, the next generation of Jays will fledge, though if migration is on, I doubt I'll catch it. But I will slow down at the pond and put the binos on the Red-belly.

'P' AND 'C' WORD BIRDS LODGE FORMAL COMPLAINT



*We the undersigned
protest the egregious
exclusion from this
publication based purely
on nomenclature*

*Northern-giant Petrel
Crested Caracara
Cardinal
Piping Plover
Prothonotary Warbler
Carolina Chickadee*

EDITORIAL RESPONSE

A Carrier Pigeon delivered this note the day before press date.

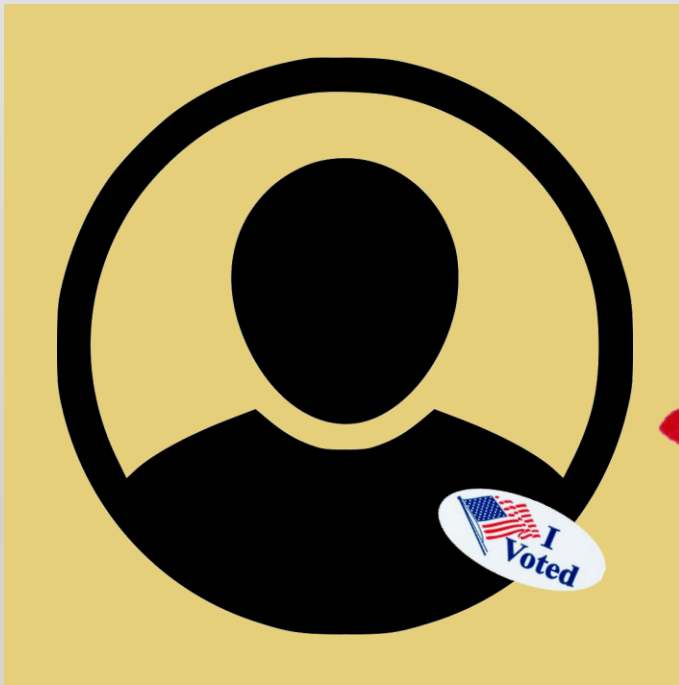
The effort for birds to find paper and pencil, then scratch signatures was herculean. Not to mention their complaint had merit.

In the spirit of fairness, avian cooperation and this pretty much being 'a bird magazine'...the 'P-Word' and 'C-Word' prohibition was lifted, and their complaint aired.

Fly safe!

VOTED

Your
picture
here



**You speak
for them**

