

Birds of the Elling O. Eide Preserve in the SPRING

Jessie Merkel, Sarasota Audubon Society, Jose Soto-Shoender, Matthew Wells



Photo by Pam Koepf

Jessie Merkel

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INTRODUCTION

Fall, Winter, and Spring surveys were carried out at the Elling O. Eide Center preserve in Sarasota, Florida, from September 2022 to May 2023. This Spring report is a follow-up to the Fall report completed in December 2022.

One hundred and eleven bird species were recorded on the property by sight, sound, in the bay, or flying over. According to the categories established by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), one vulnerable and three near-threatened species were identified on the preserve. Forty-nine migratory species were identified using the site.

Key habitats for the birds on the preserve included oak and pine tree forests, the lagoon, and the bay. David and Shawn Moulton maintain the property. The bordering preserve is Bayonne. On Bayonne's west side, the bay has been voted to be developed into an apartment complex. The destruction of this land will drastically impact the ecosystem inhabiting that area and cause more pollution in varying forms.

Breeding season, for some species, is during the springtime. I worked with the property managers, David and Shawn, to purchase and set up wood duck boxes. Wood duck boxes were set up in the lagoon for the four pairs of wood ducks to nest in.

The Elling O. Eide Center hired an environmental intern from the New College of Florida to complete a bird survey of the property along with volunteers from the Sarasota Audubon Society. Jessie Merkel, an undergraduate senior environmental studies student from the New College of Florida, carried out these surveys. Kathryn Young, vice president of the Sarasota Audubon Society, led the volunteers. Dr. Jose Soto-Shoender of the Biology and Ecology field at New College and Dr. Matthew Wells, the director of research from the Center, are supervisors of this research.

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The Spring report charts migrating birds, breeding birds, and the year-round residents at the preserve. The methods section intends to guide any future surveyors on the procedures done on this property. The strategies used are vital to identifying birds.

This report includes a deeper investigation of the plant life on the preserve. Connecting the birding behavior to the habitats on the preserve can show how interconnected and dependent they are on each other.

The bird survey will be complete after May 2023; compiled is the data in both reports. This survey helps understand the bird community on the preserve and how it changes between seasons.

STUDY AREA

The Elling O. Eide preserve is located on Little Sarasota Bay. Across the bay are Siesta Key and Turtle Beach. The preserve is on the other side of the fence of the Bayonne Park. On the south side of the preserve is Pelican Cove condominiums. There are three docks on the property, two leading into the bay. A lagoon on the property named the Everett Barney Lagoon has the third dock. The property is 72 acres and has two greenhouses, two guesthouses, one Chinese library, and a few other homes scattered throughout. *Figure One* displays these features.

The preserve has no sea wall. This is an advantage for the shore birds as it gives them a natural littoral shelf, which is the area where the land slopes into the water. Without the sea wall, the birds have a beach to forage and feed. But more of the coast gets eroded faster. The littoral shelf is crucial in biodiversity and providing food and vegetation. Plenty of mangroves are along the bayshore, holding things together and providing coverage and homes to plenty of wildlife.

Figure Two below depicts where the habitats are in relation to the trails.



Figure One: Updated Survey Trail



Figure Two: Habitats

METHODS

The methods for this bird survey are consistent and thorough. Consistency is crucial when performing surveys so results are accurate and invariable.

It is vital to begin surveying around the time the sun rises. Staring up at the sky and spotting birds gets much more challenging the higher the sun is, and birds are more active in the early morning. The spring birding surveys, like the fall ones, began at 8 am every Wednesday from the beginning of January till the beginning of May. The session lasted anywhere from 2 to 4 hours, depending on the level of bird activity.

Surveys began in front of the Library, by the Lagoon. The Sarasota Audubon volunteers and I convened there, started the eBird checklist, and set out onto the Lagoon dock. The spring volunteer groups were smaller in number than the fall, with around 2-3 birders. A map of the route is provided in *Figure One*, and a summary of *Figure Two* is as follows;

- Lagoon dock,
- Mangrove dock,
- Beach next to boat dock,
- Fruiting trees between Pelican Cove property and Harold's House,
- Behind big greenhouse,
- Forest trail,
- Guest houses,
- 14 acres by front entrance,
- Mangrove trail beginning from front entrance and exiting by Lagoon

By the time January rolled around, the property managers had cleared the trails of hurricane debris and were accessible.

We report our findings to the eBird app because it provides the following:

- A route of the session.
- The number of individuals of each species spotted or heard.
- The length of the survey is in miles and minutes.

eBird allows users to create a more descriptive checklist by adding comments and any photos we took of the species we were reporting. The information collected on eBird can also be shared with anyone else on eBird, allowing more extensive studies in the community. The data collected can be easily accessed and compiled to present. However,

because the property is a privately owned one, no one can access the Elling O. Eide surveys we collect unless the survey is shared with them while it is being completed. Therefore, the surveys we conducted for the fall and spring seasons are essential for sharing information on the species and plant life on the property.

Other apps that proved especially useful were Merlin Bird ID and iNaturalist. Merlin Bird ID is an app with many features, notably the ability to identify birds based on recordings of their sounds. The app also can identify birds based on descriptions of their shape, size, and feather color. iNaturalist identifies flora and fauna and offers suggestions based on images uploaded. Community members can contribute ID suggestions based on posts. iNaturalist was especially helpful during the spring portion of this project due to the abundance of flowering plants.

RESULTS

Table One depicts species that are new to the survey.

SPECIES	ABUNDANCE	HABITAT	IUCN STATUS	RESIDENCY	*ROLE	**ORIGIN
Ducks						
Black-bellied Whistling-duck <i>Dendrocygna autumnalis</i>	Rare	Marshes	LC	Year-Round	Omnivore	Native
Mottled Duck <i>Anas fulvigula</i>	Rare	Water	LC	Year-Round	Omnivore	Native
Lesser Scaup <i>Aythya affinis</i>	Uncommon	Water	LC	Migratory	Molluscivore	Native
Red-breasted Merganser <i>Mergus serrator</i>	Uncommon	Water	LC	Migratory	Carnivore	Native
Grebes						
Pied-billed Grebe <i>Podilymbus</i>	Rare	Water	LC	Year-Round	Molluscivore	Native

<i>podiceps</i>						
Hérons						
Tricolored Heron <i>Egretta tricolor</i>	Rare	Marshes	LC	Year-Round	Piscivorous	Native
Black-crowned Night Heron <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	Rare	Water	LC	Year-Round	Carnivore	Native
Hawks						
Sharp-shinned Hawk <i>Accipiter striatus</i>	Rare	Forest	LC	Migratory	Avivore	Native
Rails						
Common Gallinule <i>Gallinula galeata</i>	Common	Water	LC	Year-Round	Omnivore	Native
Cranes						
Sandhill Crane <i>Antigone canadensis</i>	Rare	Marshes	LC	Winter Resident	Omnivore	Native
Shorebirds						
Ruddy Turnstone <i>Arenaria interpres</i>	Uncommon	Coast	LC	Winter Resident	Molluscivore	Native
Gulls and Terns						
Herring Gull <i>Larus argentatus</i>	Uncommon	Coast	LC	Migratory	Omnivore	Native
Ring-billed Gull <i>Larus delawarensis</i>	Rare	Coast	LC	Migratory	Omnivore	Native

Least Tern <i>Sternula antillarum</i>	Rare	Shore-lines	LC	Breeding	Carnivore	Native, Imperiled
Caspian Tern <i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>	Uncommon	Water	LC	Winter Resident	Carnivore	Native
Pigeons and Doves						
Rock Pigeon <i>Columba livia</i>	Rare	Suburbs	LC	Year-Round	Granivore	Nonnative
Eurasian Collared Dove <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Uncommon	Suburbs	LC	Year-Round	Granivore	Nonnative
Cuckoos						
Yellow-billed Cuckoo <i>Coccyzus americanus</i>	Rare	Open Woodlands	LC	Breeding	Insectivore	Native
Owls and Nightjars						
Eastern Screech-Owl <i>Megascops asio</i>	Rare	Wooded habitats near water	LC	Year-Round	Carnivore	Native
Barred Owl <i>Strix varia</i>	Rare	Forest	LC	Year-Round	Carnivore	Native
Chuck-Will's-Widow <i>Antrostomus carolinensis</i>	Rare	Open Woodlands	NT	Breeding	Insectivore	Native
Flycatchers						
Great-crested Flycatcher <i>Myiarchus crinitus</i>	Common	Wooded habitats	LC	Breeding	Insectivore	Native

Eastern Kingbird <i>Tyrannus tyrannus</i>	Rare	Grass-lands	LC	Breeding	Insectivore	Native
Vireos						
White-eyed Vireo <i>Vireo griseus</i>	Common	Wooded habitats	LC	Year-Round	Insectivore	Native
Yellow-throated Vireo <i>Vireo flavifrons</i>	Rare	Open Wood-lands	LC	Migratory	Insectivore	Native
Swallows						
Purple Martin <i>Progne subis</i>	Uncommon	Lakes and Ponds	LC	Breeding	Insectivore	Native
Thrushes						
American Robin <i>Turdus migratorius</i>	Abundant	Wooded habitats	LC	Winter Resident	Frugivore, Insectivore	Native
Swainson's Thrush <i>Catharus ustulatus</i>	Rare	Forests	LC	Migration	Insectivore	Native
Blackbirds						
Brown-headed Cowbird <i>Molothrus ater</i>	Rare	Grass-lands	LC	Winter Resident	Granivore	Native
Finches						
American Goldfinch <i>Spinus tristis</i>	Uncommon	Fields	LC	Winter Resident	Granivore	Native
Waxwings						
Cedar Waxwing <i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>	Common	Open Wood-lands	LC	Migratory	Frugivore	Native

Warblers						
Common Yellowthroat <i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	Rare	Scrub	LC	Breeding	Insectivore	Native

Table One

Key:

Abundance based on frequency identified on the preserve

IUCN Conservation Status: Least Concern, Near Threatened, Vulnerable

***Origin in North America*

DISCUSSION

This report follows the first official attempt at recording the bird species found on the Elling O. Eide preserve property in the fall of 2023. There are several eBird checklists from late 2018 till May 2019 from Nancy Edmondson during the first plant inventorying from the Marie Selby Botanical Garden surveyors. Therefore this survey is the most up-to-date report on the bird populations on the property.

Because this property hosts an array of habitats (shoreline, pond, forest, open fields, brush), many different species of birds have been observed here. The ecological services provided by the various species of birds across the property promotes ecological diversity and abundance. The variety of bird species helps care for each duty required of the ecosystem. The abundance of flowering and fruiting trees attracts frugivores, insectivores, and herbivores. The shoreline and coastal waters attract all the piscivores, carnivores, and omnivores. The forest and forest edges are teeming with all kinds of birds, especially granivores, muscivores, and avivorous raptors.

Below is a list of UPDATED hotspots on the preserve:

- The pink floss-silk trees (*Ceiba speciosa*) have seed pods that have burst into the bulbs of floss-silk that contain the seeds for the tree. This silky material is great for warblers and other nesting birds to include in their nests.

- Northern Parulas nest in the spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*) hanging from trees.

- The 4 pairs of wood ducks have been investigating the bald (snag) palm tree with the tree hole in front of Harold's house for nesting purposes.

- The wood ducks can also be seen in any of the large oak and pine trees looking for nesting holes.

-Red-bellied Woodpeckers have nested in various bald palm holes on the property.

-Yellow-crowned Night-herons nest at the end of March. They are nesting in the pine trees.

-Various species have begun singing their mating calls due to their hormone changes at this time of year. These hormones are what are driving them to migrate and establish nesting and territory sites. Some of the notable birds changing their song are the catbirds, vireos, tanagers, and the warblers.

-The mulberry tree (*genus Morus*) next to Harold's house has begun fruiting, providing food for migrants such as thrushes, orioles, tanagers, vireos, and catbirds, as well as an array of other birds and creatures.

-The Bombax tree (*Bombax ceiba*) flowers hold water and are a popular spot for crows and woodpecker species looking for a drink.

-Owl pellets have been found on the mangrove dock. The property managers have seen pellets all over the property.

-A Bastard Mahogany (*Andira inermis*) by the shore is covered in woodpecker holes.

-The flame vine (*Pyrostegia venusta*), an invasive species, has covered the trees closest to the big greenhouse and attracts insect pollinators and nectar-eating birds, such as hummingbirds, as well as red-bellied woodpeckers.

-All of the mango trees on the property are blooming and are full of bees.

-Frugivores are eating the carrotwood fruit (*Cupaniopsis anacardioides*).

-The Sausage trees (*Kigelia africana*) were originally pollinated by bats.

-The Bombax tree (*Bombax ceiba*) flowers hold water and are a popular spot for crows and woodpecker species looking for a drink.

Some exciting developments on the property this year are the addition of two new wood duck boxes for nesting purposes. The property managers, David and Shawn, set up the new boxes on the lagoon dock. As of April, two pairs of wood ducks have nested in the boxes. The bald eagle's babies have hatched and spotted in their nests on the preserve next door. Juvenile eagles have been spotted all over the Elling O. Eide Preserve.

However, the red tide has washed up many dead fish and stingrays. During the periods

of red tide, there has been noticeably less bird activity in the bay due to the toxic waters and horrible smell that leaves behind illness.

The methods used were very successful and yielded lots of results and identification. Due to the abundance of flowering, fruiting, pine, and oak trees on the property, there was an expectation for bountiful wildlife. My assumptions were correct once we completed the survey. Adding an afternoon survey could be interesting. Earlier morning sessions would also aid in identifying birds that stop singing when the sun rises.

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