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## Brilliant birding a bonus of filter marsh

### Stormwater treatment area helps Everglades restoration, hosts birding experience 'unparalleled' in South Fla.

By [Byron Stout](#)

Originally posted on January 11, 2007

Without an abiding interest in civil engineering, you might not want to drive 100 miles to the middle of nowhere to see Stormwater Treatment Area 5 — or STA-5 as it's known in the lexicon of Everglades Restoration. And you'd be missing out.

STA-5 is more than 5,000 acres of shallow ponds filled with aquatic plants — mostly exotic hydrilla — which take phosphorous and other nutrients from the runoff of the Everglades Agricultural Area before it's sent south into the Everglades. And if you've seen one pump station, you've pretty much seen 'em all.

But STA-5 is drawing people to its levees from all across Florida, and the world, for other reasons that are fascinating.

"As a birding experience it's unparalleled anywhere in South Florida," according to Vince Lucas of the Caloosa Bird Club.

The vast man-made marsh has become a magnet for 14 species of ducks including the largest populations of fulvous whistling and black-bellied tree ducks in the



Andrew West/news-press.com

A northern harrier catches a splash in the face after swooping on a diving blue-winged teal in Stormwater Treatment Area 5. STA-5 is a vast filter marsh man-made for Everglades restoration that is attracting birds by the thousands, and birders from around the world.

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United States, plus completely out-of-place migrants like cinnamon teal and snow geese.

There also are duck-eating peregrine falcons, bald eagles and northern harriers, snail-loving kites and limpkins, swallows and songbirds, alligators, river otters and more.

So far birders have listed 130 species on twice monthly tours of the area, guided by the Hendry-Glades Audubon Society.

“It’s not really guided. People are on their own, but we try to get an experienced birder to be with a group, and for each group to have at least one (spotting) scope,” said Margaret England, the tour coordinator.

Birders can travel miles of unpaved but well maintained levees in cars, photographers can shoot from the backs of pickups. Bicycle riders and hikers also are welcome.

Alternately scheduled duck hunts on the area keep some birds skittish, but many show little or no regard for humans.

“They don’t even seem to be affected when we walk,” England noted.

Retired Clewiston pediatrician Dr. Marty Valiant said she’s not an expert birder, but she finds the area compelling.

“We saw some awesome stuff out there a couple of weeks ago — bald eagles and some of those big swamp hens that are supposed to be a threat to gallinules,” she recalled.

The purple swamp hens, or pukekos (poo-KAY-kohs), described by birders as “purple gallinules on steroids,” now are established in the Everglades after escaping Miami Metrozoo during Hurricane Andrew.

Such sights make bird fans gush.

“That place out there is fantastic,” Lucas said.

“We watched a white pelican swim over to an American coot and grab it and toss it up in the air and swallow it. You could see the live coot trying to get out of its pouch. It was bizarre, but interesting.”

**IF YOU GO**


- WHEN: 8:30 a.m. Jan. 13 and 27, Feb. 3 and 17, March 10 and 31, April 1, 14 or 28, and May 12. Subject to cancellation in bad weather.
- WHERE: Meet at STA-5 gate, 2.5 miles down a dirt road past the end of Blumberg Road.
- RESERVATIONS: Contact Margaret England, (863) 674-0695 or (863) 517-0202; e-mail [sta5birding@earthlink.net](mailto:sta5birding@earthlink.net)
- COST: Free

**THE BIRDS**

130 species seen along Blumberg Rd. from C.R. 835 to STA-5. From Nov. 20, 2005, through Dec. 9, 2006. Compiled by Vincent Lucas and Margaret England [vlucas@swfla.rr.com](mailto:vlucas@swfla.rr.com) & [sta5birding@earthlink.net](mailto:sta5birding@earthlink.net)

Updated December 9, 2006

- \_\_\_ Black-bellied Whistling-Duck
- \_\_\_ Fulvous Whistling-Duck
- \_\_\_ Snow Goose
- \_\_\_ Wood Duck
- \_\_\_ Gadwall
- \_\_\_ American Wigeon
- \_\_\_ Mallard
- \_\_\_ Mottled Duck
- \_\_\_ Blue-winged Teal
- \_\_\_ Cinnamon Teal (2005)\*\*\*\*
- \_\_\_ Northern Shoveler
- \_\_\_ Northern Pintail
- \_\_\_ Green-winged Teal
- \_\_\_ Redhead
- \_\_\_ Canvasback
- \_\_\_ Ring-necked Duck
- \_\_\_ Hooded Merganser
- \_\_\_ Lesser Scaup
- \_\_\_ Ruddy Duck
- \_\_\_ Northern Bobwhite
- \_\_\_ Pied-billed Grebe
- \_\_\_ American White Pelican
- \_\_\_ Double-crested Cormorant
- \_\_\_ Anhinga
- \_\_\_ American Bittern
- \_\_\_ Least Bittern
- \_\_\_ Great Blue Heron
- \_\_\_ Great Egret
- \_\_\_ Snowy Egret
- \_\_\_ Little Blue Heron



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“We try to get out of there by noon,” Lucas said. “But if the birding is really good, we’ve been there until 3 o’clock.”

- \_\_\_ Tricolored Heron
- \_\_\_ Cattle Egret
- \_\_\_ Green Heron
- \_\_\_ Black-crowned Night-Heron
- \_\_\_ Yellow-crowned Night-Heron
- \_\_\_ White Ibis
- \_\_\_ Glossy Ibis
- \_\_\_ Roseate Spoonbill
- \_\_\_ Wood Stork
- \_\_\_ Black Vulture
- \_\_\_ Turkey Vulture
- \_\_\_ Osprey
- \_\_\_ Swallow-tailed Kite
- \_\_\_ Snail Kite
- \_\_\_ Bald Eagle
- \_\_\_ Northern Harrier
- \_\_\_ Sharp-shinned Hawk
- \_\_\_ Cooper's Hawk
- \_\_\_ Red-shouldered Hawk
- \_\_\_ Red-tailed Hawk
- \_\_\_ Crested Caracara
- \_\_\_ American Kestrel
- \_\_\_ Merlin
- \_\_\_ Peregrine Falcon
- \_\_\_ King Rail
- \_\_\_ Sora
- \_\_\_ Purple Swamphen (Exotic)
- \_\_\_ Purple Gallinule
- \_\_\_ Common Moorhen
- \_\_\_ American Coot
- \_\_\_ Limpkin
- \_\_\_ Black-bellied Plover
- \_\_\_ American Golden-Plover
- \_\_\_ Killdeer
- \_\_\_ Semipalmated Plover
- \_\_\_ Black-necked Stilt
- \_\_\_ American Avocet
- \_\_\_ Greater Yellowlegs
- \_\_\_ Lesser Yellowlegs
- \_\_\_ Marbled Godwit
- \_\_\_ Semipalmated Sandpiper
- \_\_\_ Western Sandpiper
- \_\_\_ Spotted Sandpiper
- \_\_\_ Least Sandpiper
- \_\_\_ Pectoral Sandpiper
- \_\_\_ Dunlin
- \_\_\_ Stilt Sandpiper
- \_\_\_ Ruff (2004)\*\*\*\*
- \_\_\_ Short-billed Dowitcher

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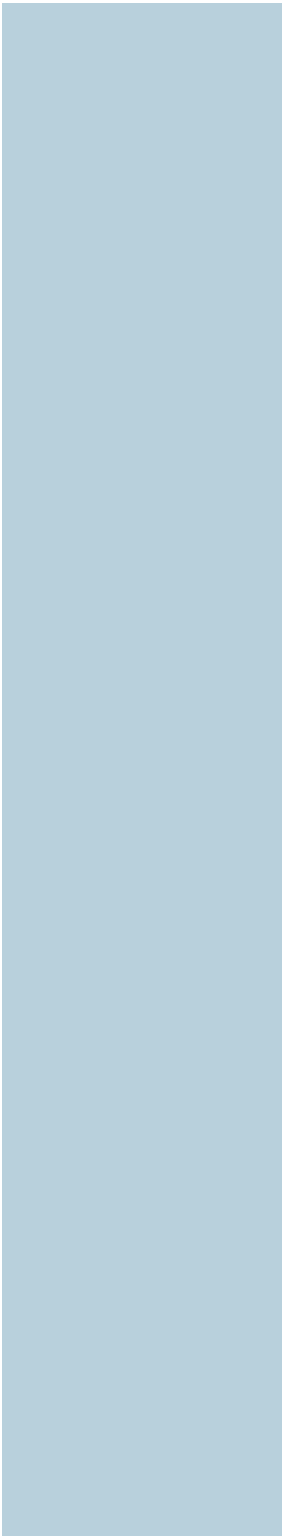
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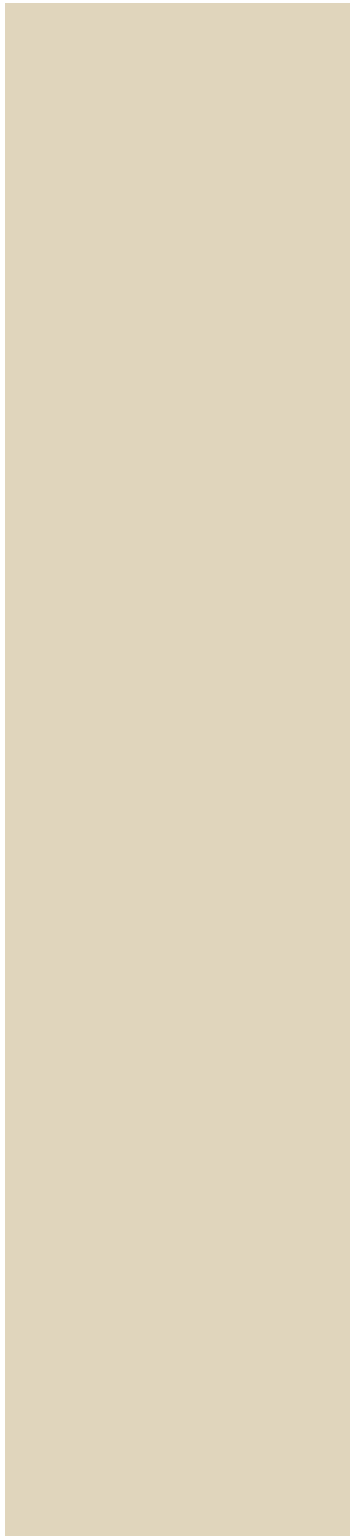
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- \_\_\_ Rock Pigeon
- \_\_\_ Eurasian Collared-Dove
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- \_\_\_ Yellow-billed Cuckoo
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- \_\_\_ Northern Mockingbird
- \_\_\_ European Starling
- \_\_\_ Yellow Warbler
- \_\_\_ Yellow-rumped Warbler
- \_\_\_ Palm Warbler
- \_\_\_ Northern Waterthrush
- \_\_\_ Common Yellowthroat
- \_\_\_ Eastern Towhee
- \_\_\_ Savannah Sparrow
- \_\_\_ Northern Cardinal
- \_\_\_ Indigo Bunting
- \_\_\_ Painted Bunting
- \_\_\_ Bobolink
- \_\_\_ Red-winged Blackbird
- \_\_\_ Eastern Meadowlark
- \_\_\_ Common Grackle
- \_\_\_ Boat-tailed Grackle



— Brown-headed Cowbird

\*\*\*\*Cinnamon Teal was sighted in 2005 and Ruff in 2004.

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