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The Audubon Ark: a History of the National Audubon Society

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REVIEW

Fla. Field Nat. 19(3): 86-87, 1991.

The Audubon Ark: A History of the National Audubon Society.—Frank Graham, Jr. 1990. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. ISBN 0-394-58164-4. \$29.95.—The title of this 334-page book captures the mission of the National Audubon Society, the protection of wild birds and other animals in their natural habitats. This authorized history of the National Audubon Society traces its evolution from the 1880's to the late 1980's. Originally started as a series of pamphlets published by George Bird Grinnell to protest plume hunting for the millinery trade, the National Audubon Society today has a professional staff of 350 and over a half million members in more than 500 local chapters. Through lobbying, education, and publicity efforts, the society has swayed public opinion in such diverse areas as migratory bird laws, widespread spraying of pesticides, the whaling industry, fishing flies, and the alligator leather trade. The author paints a colorful account of the environmental movement in the United States by tracing the dealings of this often controversial organization. The inclusion of 48 black-and-white photographs, many of them quite old, adds realism and value to this highly collectible book.

The Audubon Ark is particularly interesting because of its many references to Florida. The book describes the selling of flamingos for five dollars a pair in Key West in the 1850's. Opposition to plume hunting in the Everglades resulted in the institution of Audubon's warden system and gave momentum to the society. The establishment of Audubon's research station at Tavernier in the late 1930's for studying the only nesting colony of Roseate Spoonbills in Florida is described in vivid detail, as are the subsequent research activities around Florida Bay. The account of building the mile-long boardwalk through Corkscrew Swamp in the 1950's will give new appreciation to anyone visiting this sanctuary, acquired by the society for the protection of the Wood Stork. The resident cranes, ibises, egrets, and caracaras of the Kissimmee Prairie led the society to purchase over 7,000 acres there. Other historic references to Florida include Pelican Island, National Key Deer Wildlife Refuge, Great White Heron Refuge, Lake Okeechobee, Tampa Bay, and Ten Thousand Islands.

Dedicated to wildlife management and natural resource conservation, the society maintains a quarter million acres in sanctuaries nationwide. This book presents the ups and downs of land acquisition and the specifics about many of the society's 80 sanctuaries. Endeavors in the field of education, including publications, nature camps, film making, and television programs, are also documented.

Audubon, the popular magazine published by the society, has an interesting history all its own. Graham describes its early beginnings as *Audubon Magazine*, a spin-off of Grinnell's *Forest and Stream* in the 1880's. It was known as *Bird Lore* from 1899 to 1940, and eventually evolved into the award-winning publication *Audubon*, called "the most beautiful magazine in the world" by *The New York Times*. These publications along with personal interviews formed the basis of the painstaking research that went into producing a book of this caliber. The author gives credit to Carl W. Buchheister, a former president of the National Audubon Society, for the early planning of the book, his research efforts, and his collection of documents turned over to the author in 1986.

The assortment of facts contained in this book, many of them obscure, will fascinate the reader. For example, at the suggestion of the society in the mid-1950's, a 25-million-candlepower fixed-beam light on top of the Empire State Building was extinguished during migration to save thousands of migratory birds each year. Tales of the days with bounties on bald eagles, considered a pest species, are enough to ruffle the feathers of any "Auduboner" today. The society itself had less than scrupulous dealings which will surprise the reader—such as its half million dollars per year in oil revenues from a Louisiana sanctuary.

As *The Audubon Ark* portrays, the Audubon Society involves more than birds. Its history owes its greatness to the people who worked for its causes and spread the message that humans are closely linked to the natural world. Graham's book captures the society's treatment of nature as delicate, interdependent ecosystems and stimulates environmental empathy.—**Victoria L. Merritt**, 8558 S.E. Sharon Street, Hobe Sound, FL 33455.

REPORTS

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Summary of the 1991 Spring Meeting.—The spring meeting of the Florida Ornithological Society was held at the Bahia Beach Island Resort in Ruskin, Florida, from 19 to 21 April. Tampa Audubon Society was the host chapter, and Gail Parsons was the local committee chair.

During the board meeting, the Board voted to award the Helen G. and Allan D. Cruickshank Research Award of \$500 to Mr. Reuven Yosef of Ohio State University for work on the "Evaluation of a technique for reversing the population decline of the Loggerhead Shrike." The Board gave \$800 to the Florida Breeding Bird Atlas project for the final year of field work. Dr. J. W. Hardy has resigned as Editor of Special Publications, and Dr. Glen Woolfenden was appointed to the position. During the annual membership meeting on Saturday, new officers and directors were elected. Glen Woolfenden was elected President, P. William Smith Vice President, Roberta Geanangel Treasurer, and Bruce Neville Secretary. New Directors are Reed Bowman, Todd Engstrom, and Bill Pranty, with Dr. William Robertson elected to fill the remaining year of P. William Smith's term.

The Saturday afternoon paper session on "Breeding Biology and Management of Florida Kestrels" was moderated by Reed Bowman. Dr. Robert Loftin spoke on "A Florida Kestrel nest box program." Dr. John Smallwood spoke on a "Nest box program for management of the southeastern American Kestrel," co-authored by Dr. Michael Collopy. Dr. James Layne spoke on "Nest sites and habitat associations of resident Kestrels in south-central Florida." Dr. Michael Collopy spoke on "Habitat protection guidelines for the southeastern American Kestrel."

Field trips were held to Little Manatee River, Alafia Banks, McKay Bay, Cockroach Bay, and Fort DeSoto Park. The "skin" quiz was a contest to add the most species to the Ruskin quad for the Breeding Bird Atlas project and was won by the team of Joe Ondrejko, Sue Smith, and Mickey Wheeler. The banquet speaker was Rich Paul, Manager of National Audubon's Tampa Bay Sanctuaries, who spoke on "Population, Wildlife, and Habitat: A Comparison of Bird Sanctuaries in Florida and Thailand."

The 1991 fall meeting will be 4-6 October in Jacksonville. The 1992 spring meeting will be a joint meeting with the Wilson Ornithological Society in Kissimmee 9-12 April.—**Bruce Neville**, 3757 Maria Circle, Tallahassee, FL 32303.