



Corkscrew  
Swamp Sanctuary

## Along the Boardwalk

January, 2009

[www.corkscrew.audubon.org](http://www.corkscrew.audubon.org)

### Volunteer activities

- TogetherGreen Volunteer Work Day  
January 24, 9 AM – 3 PM
- Check the Bunting House bulletin board for dates and signup sheets for 2009 volunteer field trips.

## Corkscrew Christmas Bird Count nets 116 species

Teams of birders were in the field from sunrise to sunset on Saturday, December 20, identifying and tallying birds in the Corkscrew area as part of the 109th Christmas Bird Count sponsored by National Audubon Society.

The area extended generally from Immokalee and Lake Trafford south to 18th Avenue in Golden Gate Estates, and from just west of Corkscrew east toward State Road 29. The area was divided into ten territories with teams of birders covering each of those areas by car, boat, bicycle, and on foot.

Results from each of the areas were then tallied and combined at a roundup in the classrooms of the Blair Center that night. Those results will be sub-



Team 8 surveys a field where it found Meadowlarks, Killdeer, Kestrels, a Mockingbird, Tree Swallows, Mourning Doves, Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, Cattle Egrets, and Wood Storks. Members from left to right are Paul Gaston, Jean Gaston, Dick Brewer, Diane Kreager, and Joe Ambrozy (photo Jack Kreager).

The most commonly observed birds were Tree Swallows with 2,098 individuals. The Tree Swallows were followed by Common Grackles (841), Mourning Doves (822), Turkey Vultures (779), Boat-tailed Grackles (720), Robins (665), White Ibis (635), Cattle Egrets (533), Black Vultures (449), and Killdeer (431).

The number of warblers was down from previous years. Only Palm Warblers (324), Yellow-rumps (251), and Pine Warblers (161) were seen in any number, and even those numbers were low.

Unusual sightings included two Black Ducks, two Caspian Terns, 22 Short-billed Dowitchers, a King Rail, a Virginia Rail, three Soras, a Field Sparrow, a Grasshopper Sparrow, and a White-throated Sparrow (under the Bunting House feeder).

mitted to National Audubon Society which will combine results from around the country. For complete information, visit [www.audubon.org/Bird/cbc](http://www.audubon.org/Bird/cbc).

The total of Corkscrew's observations was 116 species and 14,410 individuals. A list is in the Bunting House.

## Quick ID Guide: Two small spiders that hang upside down in horizontal webs

**Mabel Orchard Spider**, *Leucauge mabelae*, has a yellow-green abdomen with eight silvery stripes on top and three orange spots below. It hangs below its horizontal web or waits nearby with one leg touching a strand until prey is caught. It and the very similar **Venusta Orchard Spider**, *Leucauge venusta*, were combined as a single species in 1980.

**Long-jawed Orbweavers**, *Tetragnatha* spp., characteristically cling to a support with their short third pair of legs

while holding their remaining, much longer legs extended in front and behind the body. They spin small webs that are 8" to 12" in diameter. There are about 25 species of *Tetragnatha* in



Mabel Orchard Spider

North America. The webs of most members of this family are usually tilted, sometimes close to horizontal, and are often found in association with foliage bordering water.



Long-jawed Orbweaver

### Bird Trivia

**Which American wood warbler has the most specialized feeding technique?**

Discover the answer at [www.collieraudubon.org/birding.html](http://www.collieraudubon.org/birding.html)

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## In Case a Visitor Asks

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### Why do some cypress trees grow needles when they should be dropping them ?

Cypress trees normally begin to drop their needles in November, are bare by mid-December, and start new growth in mid to late February.

There's actually no reason why the cypress trees need to drop needles at all. They don't face harsh winter weather, and growing conditions are good all year.

But because cypress trees are temperate rather than tropical plants, they follow the leaf-dropping routine anyway. A slight change in the annual schedule does not harm the tree.



Several factors may affect the typical growth schedule.

One possibility is weather. An un-

usually warm spell with lots of sun and some rain may convince some trees that it's time to grow needles.

A more likely explanation is caterpillars disrupting the pattern. Many plants respond to pruning with renewed growth, so when a fall infestation of caterpillars strip many of the cypress trees of needles, the trees respond with new growth once the cause of the defoliation is gone, which is usually in late November or early December.

Trees that aren't as affected by caterpillars follow the regular schedule.

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## December Sightings

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An Anhinga tenderizes and positions a Brown Hoplo before swallowing (December 23).



A Water Moccasin rests by a cypress base near the Dodson Spur (Dec. 15, photo Jack Kreager).



A White-throated Sparrow first appeared by the Bunting House on December 3 (December 5).

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## Odds & Ends

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### Brazilian Pepper berry pickers puzzle birders passing by during bird count

Brazilian Pepper, *Schinus terebinthifolius Raddi* is a species of tree indigenous to Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay, and it is a very unwelcome, invasive exotic in Florida.

During this year's Christmas Bird Count, volunteer birders encountered several teams of workers harvesting the ripe berries from roadside plants. The workers said they receive \$.45/pound for the berries, but the workers didn't know how the berries would be used.

The early berries of Brazilian Peppers are glossy, juicy, and green, eventually turning a bright red. Upon ripening, the berries become very dry, losing their fleshiness almost entirely and leaving only a seed surrounded by a dry pericarp (skin). The flavor is one of a slight sweetness at first, due to consid-

erable amounts of sugar in the berry, but the taste rapidly becomes pungent and peppery with a hint of menthol.

Historically, most Brazilian Pepper berries were harvested on the Pacific island of Réunion and exported to France where they were processed (freeze-dried, canned in brine, pickled in vinegar, or packed in oil) for the further export under the name of Pink Peppercorns.

The peppercorn-sized fruits are usually sold in a dry state and are what is found in gourmet food shops. In European *nouvelle cuisine*, they are mostly used in a decorative mixture with white, black, and green peppercorns.

While there are some 2,000 species that belong to the pepper family

(*Piperaceae*), Brazilian pepper is not any of them. It belongs to the Sumac family (*Anacardiaceae*) and is closely related to species such as poison ivy and poison sumac.

The berries of the Florida species are sometimes accused of causing respiratory ailment or irritation of mucous membranes. This may be due to urushiol-type allergens; the spice grown in Réunion appears to be free of urushiols.

Berries of a common relative found in southern California, *Schinus molle* (a native of Peru), are also harvested and sold as Pink Peppercorns, with much less of a risk of allergic reaction.

Food reference for Brazilian Pepper—<http://doves2day.blogspot.com/2008/09/pink-saturday-pink-peppercorns.html>

## POISON IVY

*Toxicodendron radicans*

Poison ivy is one of the most notorious plants in North America. It does not spare age, sex, race or economic status. It and poison oak account for an estimated ten percent of lost work time in the U. S. Forest Service.

The first published records of poison ivy in North America date back to the early 1600s in the writings of Captain John Smith. In fact, Captain Smith coined the common name because of its superficial resemblance to English ivy or Boston ivy.

Poison ivy is a harmful vine or shrub in the cashew family. It grows plentifully in the eastern United States and Canada. Usually a vine twining on tree trunks or straggling over the ground, it often forms upright bushes if it has no support to climb upon

Species related to poison ivy include poison oak, which grows in the Pacific Northwest and nearby regions of Canada, and poison sumac, which grows in the Eastern United States. Poison oak and poison sumac both are shrubs.

Poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac have poisonous sap (urushiol) in their roots, stems, leaves and fruit. The sap is released when the plant is bruised, making it easier to contract Rhus-dermatitis (poison ivy used to be classified in the genus *Rhus*) in the spring and early summer when leaves are tender.

The sap may be deposited on the skin by direct contact or by contact with contaminated objects such as shoes, clothing, tools and even pets. Severe cases have occurred from sap-coated soot in the smoke of burning plants.

The sap normally stays active for one to five years on any surface, including dead plants.

Because urushiol is inside the plant, brushing against an intact plant will not cause a reaction. But undamaged plants are rare because poison oak, ivy and sumac are very fragile plants. Stems or leaves can be broken by the wind or animals, and even tiny holes made by chewing insects can release urushiol.



Leaves aren't the only nasty parts. People can get a wicked rash from yanking the vine out by the roots, even in the winter, or just by brushing against a root or stem. Using a weed eater or lawn mower to remove poison ivy can result in splattering the sap on legs and other exposed areas.

Some people appear to be immune and others to become immune. However, people can gain or lose immunity, so assuming immunity because reactions have never developed in the past is foolish. People change as they age.

The first symptom of poisoning is a severe itching of the skin. Later, a red inflammation and a blistering of the skin occurs. In severe cases, giant red, oozing sores develop.

The rash only spreads through direct contact with the sap (urushiol) and it does not spread as the result of contamination from the blisters.

People who know they've been exposed to poison ivy can take several steps to prevent or minimize a potential rash. Rinse with lots of cold water, as from a garden hose, right away. Hot water opens pores and lets the oil in, so taking a hot shower could be disastrous.

Usually within 15 minutes of contact, the urushiol binds to skin proteins.

If it is washed off with soap and water before that time, a reaction may be prevented. Once the antigen is fixed, however, it cannot be washed off or

transferred to other areas.

Once a rash develops, the oil has been absorbed and poison ivy can't spread. If big blisters filled with liquid develop, they are mostly water and will not spread the rash even if they break. New lesions that appear a few days after the primary lesions represent less sensitive areas or areas where less antigen was deposited. They are not from a spreading of the antigen.

The rash can last anywhere from one to three weeks, depending on how bad it is and how it is treated. Prescription remedies make it go away much faster.

Once the itching starts, a couple of home remedies may help relieve the itch (but not the rash): take a shower in the hottest possible water that's bearable for as long as it's bearable, which may ease the itch for up to eight hours; or, spray with a deodorant containing aluminum, which most do. For a serious case, a doctor is a necessity.

Getting rid of poison ivy in a yard isn't easy. Contact while pulling it out by the roots can cause a terrible rash, and it will likely grow back until every last bit of the root is removed.

Burning isn't good because the antigen-laced smoke can get in lungs and nose and cause unbelievable sickness.

Continual mowing might cause it to give up and die, but mowing can also cause contact. Cutting it off at the ground, letting the vine die, and then continual recutting until it gives up will work, but that may take several years.

Spraying with a broadleaf herbicide works, but frequently that kills just the parts above ground and the roots may resprout. In addition, spraying may also kill harmless, desirable plants that are nearby.

Poison ivy isn't all bad. It feeds wild birds and animals who eat it without ill effects, and it holds the earth very well against erosion.