

## A Facilitated Multi-Species Avian Workshop

The Goal: Conduct facilitated workshops on multi-species avian ecology that provides a common understanding of the science of these species and their habitats and a forum for productive interaction among scientists, policy makers, managers and interested parties.

### Overview

Comprising 18,000 square miles, the South Florida ecosystem is a diverse mix of subtropical uplands, wetlands and coral reefs. It is home to a rich diversity of plant and animal life, and many significant conservation areas. It supports the economy of Native Americans and Floridians. The culture of Native American tribes is intimately linked to the ecosystem.

The South Florida ecosystem, which is sustained by water, has been seriously degraded by losses of that natural environment and disruptions to the natural hydrology. Runoff and discharges of stormwater have further degraded aquatic habitats. There has been a 50% reduction in spatial extent of the original Everglades, a significant reduction in wading bird populations, 69 species are listed under the ESA, and there have been significant declines in corals and commercial fisheries.

Many federal, state, tribal and local entities are working hard to address the ecological conditions in South Florida and to restore the ecosystem. The South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force tracks and facilitates the coordination of the work.

The following principles guide all aspects of ecosystem restoration and management:

- The ecosystem must be managed holistically using an ecosystem-based approach
- The natural and built environments are inextricably linked to the ecosystem
- Expectations should be reasonable
- Decisions must be based on sound science
- Environmental justice and economic equity need to be integrated into restoration efforts
- Restoration efforts must meet applicable federal, state, tribal, and local responsibilities

Restoration of this ecosystem is an immense task. Managing the ecosystem as a whole requires that the agencies and stakeholders address the needs of individual species and multi-species assemblages, and pay attention to the ecosystem in all its complexity. This need is both a biological requirement and a legal one as several species are listed under the ESA as well as protected by other federal and state statutes. The Task Force has identified several indicators which help to set targets and evaluate progress. Among these indicators are: *Total system health* which includes “threatened and endangered species”, and “nesting wading birds” and *Indicators of Estuary Health* which includes species such as roseate spoonbills. Thus, the biology and management of a number of avian species is integral to the overall effort.

## **Avian Species**

The restoration, and management of several sensitive, threatened or endangered avian species is an important component of the restoration effort. Knowledge of many of these avian species has increased thanks to the efforts of many respected scientists. These scientists work for agencies and groups represented in the Task Force as well in academia and other groups.

What is needed now is an analysis and synthesis of the information so that there is a common understanding of the science. Because decision-makers must make decisions that are based on science, it is equally important that the science be understood by all. Further, it is important that the stakeholders have the opportunity to ask for scientific guidance, clarification on scientific points, and have a chance to participate with the scientists on a range of relevant topics. In other words, there should be a facilitated workshop that effectively translates and communicates scientific information to decision makers, and that equally translates management issues into scientific questions that can be addressed by the scientists working on these issues.

## **Multi-Species Avian Workshop**

We are facilitating two multi-species avian workshops that are designed to:

1. Develop a common understanding of the science around the various species
2. Provide a forum for scientific discussion and science-management discussion so that important questions are addressed for decision makers.

The workshop will focus on four avian species: Roseate spoonbills, Snail kites, Woodstorks, and Cape Sable Sparrows.

Format: The proposed format is to assemble a science panel of expert scientists. During the first workshop the panel and attendees will listen to the presentations by the individual scientists who work on the species of focus. The panel and attendees will have opportunity to ask questions of the scientists. The panel will review the information and help develop a common understanding of the science that is articulated at the meeting. This information will be synthesized and written up by the panel to facilitate discussion in the second workshop. At the second workshop the panel of experts will present their synthesis, analysis and findings. Then a facilitated discussion will be conducted to assist policy makers in their use of the scientific information in decision making.

## Proposed Date and Venue:

Workshop I: 3 day workshop beginning March 17<sup>th</sup> 2003

Venue: Westin Hotel Key Largo.

Rooms have been reserved at the hotel, under the name South Florida Ecosystem Restoration Task Force, Avian Ecology Workshop. For reservations please call 305-852-5553. Reservations must be made by February 10, 2003.

Workshop II: TBA/Late April