

WINTER IS FOR THE BIRDS ST. AUGUSTINE EDITION

Photographing Birds & Wildlife in Northeast Florida

Following our presentations on Sandhill Cranes, which document three January trips to Bosque del Apache, NM, a Federal Wildlife Management area along the Rio Grande River, and a recent February week photographing the tropical wildlife and birds of Costa Rica, we photographed wading birds of northeast Florida during two week-long trips in mid-April. We had wanted to visit St. Augustine for a long time in order to explore the rich history of one of North America's oldest cities. While researching the area, we stumbled upon the annual Florida Birding & Photo Fest held in the city during late April and its primary local birding venue, the St. Augustine Alligator Farm Zoological Park, a park which has earned a reputation as "the world's largest alligator farm." More than a century old, it features all known species of the world's crocodylians and is the only facility in the world exhibiting living specimens of all 24 currently recognized species of crocodylians along with other exotic birds and amphibians.

The park represents a very unique symbiotic relationship between amphibians and wading birds: thousands of native herons, egrets, spoonbills, and wood storks seek the security of the Alligator Swamp to roost and raise their young. With hundreds of alligators swimming beneath the oak branches, the birds know their young to be safe from tree-climbing predators. Boardwalks allow for incredibly intimate views of Florida's magnificent wading birds on their nests with March through June as the peak season for observing nesting activity and birds in full breeding plumage. During August, the birds depart only to return during the next February or March to begin a new cycle of nest building.

This presentation will review some of the highlights of our Florida trips and show a selection from our photos taken during several visits to the St. Augustine Alligator Farm and the Wakodahatchee Wetlands near Boca Raton, which is another rookery for wading birds and a variety of colorful ducks.

Photographers **Wolf** and **Linnea Koch** travel extensively; their interests in photography and history have taken them to many sites in European countries, and throughout the US. Dr. Koch, a Sterling resident, is a consultant to the oil and petrochemical industry and has been a professor of chemical engineering. He lectures on energy-related topics and offers various historical presentations. Linnea Koch is a graphic designer and photographer, known for her photos of local landmarks; she has documented the first decade of the Whiteside County Barn Tours with multimedia DVDs and has produced numerous interpretive signs on historic landmarks in the Sterling area. Linnea is an Illinois Master Gardener with a special interest in native shade plants, and has given many presentations on local landmarks, shade gardening and some of the wonderful gardens here and in Europe. Together, the Kochs teach photography seminars: ***See with an Artist's Eye*** covers art, expression and the essential aspects of digital photography technology, ***Capturing Birds & Other Wildlife with Your Camera*** extends the first presentation to photographing fast moving subjects, while ***Taking Great Travel Photos*** is a short workshop which includes suggestions on cameras and other lightweight equipment suitable for travel.