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AUDUBON SANCTUARY RECOGNIZED FOR INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary in Florida Named Vital Wetland by Ramsar Convention

Naples, FL--19 October 2009 ---Audubon of Florida's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, home of the largest stand of Bald Cypress trees in the world, and the associated Panther Island Mitigation Bank (PIMB), have been listed as a Wetland of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention.

The official designation as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance underscores the need to protect this vital resource from a host of threats, including invasive species and development in sensitive watersheds for which Corkscrew serves as an essential link. Nearly 200 species of birds thrive in the sanctuary, renowned as home to America's largest nesting colonies of Wood Stork, a federally endangered species. The storks nest in majestic 600-year-old bald cypress, reaching heights of 40 meters.

Also included in the designation are lands totaling more than 2,700 acres that were contributed to the Sanctuary, together with management funding in perpetuity, by the Panther Island Mitigation Bank. The mitigation bank project successfully restored degraded wetlands and provided additional Wood Stork habitat that complements the Corkscrew sanctuary. This is the first time Ramsar has recognized mitigation bank property.

Adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands promotes conservation of wetland habitats around the world, from the Florida Everglades to Africa's Okavango Delta. The listing of Corkscrew marks the second Audubon sanctuary in the USA to receive the prestigious listing by Ramsar. Audubon's [Beidler Forest, in South Carolina](#), was designated in 2008.

“This designation underscores the importance of protecting and preserving our wetlands around the world,” said [John Flicker](#), President of the National Audubon Society; “These wetlands are essential not only to birds and other wildlife, but provide natural flood protection for humans and their homes.”

“We are extremely pleased to see over the past year the renewed enthusiasm in the United States for including internationally important wetlands in the Ramsar List,” said Mr. Anada Tiéga, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

“We are particularly grateful for the initiative of the Audubon Society in pushing forward two recent Ramsar designations, first in South Carolina and now this fascinating and valuable wetland in southern Florida.”

Corkscrew Sanctuary first gained global significance when named an [Audubon Important Bird Area](#), part of an international initiative with BirdLife International, which identifies and protects vital bird habitats around the world. “Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary is the second of Audubon’s Important Bird Areas to be recognized as a Ramsar site;” said John Cecil, Director of the Important Bird Areas Program for Audubon and the Society’s Representative on the U.S. Ramsar Committee. “This dual acknowledgement celebrates not only the beauty and rich biodiversity found at Corkscrew, but the collaboration of Audubon, its partners, and the South Florida communities that surround it. Each has played an essential role in conserving this jewel.”

Created in 1954 to protect great old cypress forest from loggers, Corkscrew is a 13,000-acre sanctuary located inland of Naples and Ft. Myers on the west coast of Florida. In 1950, the Audubon Society purchased the area, protecting the ecosystem not only for birds, but the Florida panther, American alligator, black bear, Florida Royal palm, and rare Ghost Orchid. The Sanctuary also supports a diversity of Neotropical migrants, large numbers of wintering land birds, and the third-largest Swallow-tailed Kite roost in the United States.

“Audubon is proud that the extraordinary Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary is recognized by the International Ramsar Convention;” said David Anderson, Executive Director of Audubon of Florida. “This designation underscores the importance of protecting and preserving our wetlands: when natural habitats disappear, so do birds and other wildlife that depend on them.”

“It is a great honor for Panther Island to be the first mitigation bank to be designated,” added Stephen M. Collins, chairman of the PIMB mitigation committee. “In addition, we are grateful to Audubon for their partnering spirit and strategic vision. This project demonstrates the power of not-for-profits and private enterprise working together for the benefit of the environment.”

Owned and managed by Audubon of Florida, the swamp hosts ongoing scientific research. Removal of invasive exotic species, especially of invasive plants and of wild hogs, is a continuing challenge. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of the staff and volunteers, led by Ed Carlson, Executive Director of Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and a veteran of Audubon for 35 years, many environmental threats have been minimized or averted. Recent efforts focused on restoring the Everglades back to their natural water flows, and work to mitigate some of the human disturbance in the region.

The Blair Audubon Center at Corkscrew Sanctuary offers a full range of environmental educational opportunities. Annually 100,000 people visit Corkscrew, including 6,000 school children, contributing to the National Audubon Society’s nationwide effort to connect people with nature.

Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, located at 375 Sanctuary Road West, in Naples, is open to visitors from 7 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. everyday between April 11 and September 30. Between October 1 and April 10, Corkscrew is open to the public from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Admission to the boardwalk within one hour of closing is not allowed. The Sanctuary may close when severe weather threatens. For more information on admission fees, call (239) 348-9151.

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The Convention on Wetlands, known as the Ramsar Convention, is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. The Convention's mission statement commits the State Parties to the Convention to "the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local, regional and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world"

www.ramsar.org See also specific to Corkscrew <http://tinyurl.com/63qxx>

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More information about Corkscrew: www.audubon.org/local/sanctuary/corkscrew.

For information on Panther Island Mitigation Bank, visit www.wetlandsbank.com.
Photos and video b-roll available