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AUDUBON SANCTUARY CELEBRATES RAMSAR DESIGNATION

Corkscrew Sanctuary in Florida Named Vital Wetland OF Global Importance

Naples, FL—18 February ---Audubon of Florida's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, home of the largest stand of old-growth Bald Cypress trees in North America, hosted a celebration of its listing as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention on Thursday.

Audubon purchased Corkscrew in 1954 to protect the old-growth cypress forest from loggers. Today, Audubon manages and protects 13,000 acres located inland of Naples and Ft. Myers on the west coast of Florida. It is critical habitat not only for birds, but also for Florida panther, American alligator, black bear, and rare Ghost Orchid.

Florida Governor Charlie Crist, who originally endorsed the application for Ramsar distinction, said: "Designating Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary as a Wetland of International Importance not only highlights the ecological significance of the site, but also recognizes the contributions of many individuals who have worked hard for nearly half a century to conserve Corkscrew Swamp."

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 of which Corkscrew is an essential part. 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.

"Audubon is proud that the extraordinary Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary is recognized by the international Ramsar Convention," said [Glenn Olson](#), Audubon Donal O'Brien Chair in Bird Conservation through Advocacy and Public Policy. "This designation will help protect our wetlands: when natural habitats disappear, so do birds and other wildlife that depend on them, plus an irreplaceable quality of life for humans."

Also included in the designation are more than 2,700 acres contributed to the Sanctuary by the Panther Island Mitigation Bank ("PIMB"), which will also provide ongoing funding for long-term funding for their management. 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.

"It is a great honor for Panther Island to be the first mitigation bank to be designated," stated Stephen M. Collins, chairman of the PIMB Management committee. "We are grateful to Audubon for their partnering spirit and strategic vision."

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 nation to receive the prestigious listing by Ramsar. Audubon's [Beidler Forest, in South Carolina](#), was designated in 2008.

"We are very pleased to see in person this magnificent wetland," said Ramsar Secretary General Anada Tiega.

Under the leadership of Ed Carlson, Director of Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and a 35-year veteran of Audubon, staff and volunteers take a comprehensive approach to addressing the environmental threats confronting the sanctuary. These include removal of invasive exotic species, as well as other efforts to restore the Everglades back to their natural water flows, and mitigate some of the impacts of development in the South Florida region.

A popular destination for both local residents and tourists, 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 Audubon's nationwide effort to connect people with nature. Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary, located at 375 Sanctuary Road West, in Naples, is open to the public from 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. from October 1 to April 10 and 7 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. from April 11 to September 30.

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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.