

## 2013 Blazing Star Award recognizes Buck & Linda Cooper

Buck and Linda Cooper are both Florida natives. Buck was born in Winter Haven and Linda in Tampa. She has been a Polk resident since 1965. Buck attended the University of Florida from 1947-1950, entering the United States Air Force his senior year when the Korean War broke out. He was an Air Force navigator, retiring back to Winter Haven after 25 years active duty.



Buck has been an intense, active birder since 1977 and Linda since 1982. For the first Florida Breeding Bird Atlas – a five-year survey – Buck was the Polk County coordinator. He won the Best County Coordinator for the first year of the survey. They continue to participate in bird surveys through Cornell’s Laboratory of Ornithology migration counts and backyard bird counts.

They were resident naturalists at Audubon/Street Nature Center in Winter Haven for 13 years, living on and running the Nature Center for Lake Region Audubon Society. Many school groups, scout troops, womens’ groups and others visited the Center for nature programs and walks.

They were the 1998 recipients of Florida Audubon’s distinguished Allan Cruickshank Memorial Award for their conservation work in Florida. That same year they were recognized by the Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission (now FFWCC) with an award for their contribution to wildlife preservation.

They participated in several year-long bird surveys of conservation properties including Colt Creek State Park, Kissimmee State Park, Disney Wilderness Preserve and Circle B Bar Reserve.

They became interested in butterflies in 1996 when a butterfly garden was planted at the Nature Center. Since that time, butterflies have taken over their lives.

They organize and lead year-long butterfly surveys of conservation properties and then provide the properties with butterfly checklists for distribution. Properties surveyed for butterflies include Disney Wilderness Preserve, Colt Creek State Park, Lake Kissimmee State Park, Lake Louisa State Park, Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park, Circle B Bar Reserve, Van Fleet and Withlacoochee State Trails and Bok Tower Gardens.

For seventeen years they have organized and led annual North American Butterfly Association 4<sup>th</sup> of July Butterfly Counts. These counts are conducted the same way as Audubon’s Christmas Bird Counts. For the past few years, they have done 13 -14 of these counts in June and July. Buck compiles six of the central Florida counts.

For many years they have given programs on birds, wildflowers and butterflies all over Florida – from Niceville in the panhandle to the Florida Keys. Since 2000 these programs are almost exclusively on butterflies. Each program is tailored for specific locations such as *Gardening for Butterflies in Central Florida* or *Butterflies of the Florida Keys*.

They established a butterfly listserver on the internet for members to exchange sightings, gardening information or other butterfly news.

From 2007-2009 they were regional coordinators for Florida Natural Areas Inventory – surveying large public conservation lands for rare butterfly species. Many volunteers working under a State Wildlife Grant came together to give land managers an idea of the diversity of their properties.

From 2006-2012 Linda wrote short butterfly articles for Florida Native Plant Society's online newsletter *Sabal minor*. She has written articles for *American Butterflies* and has had cover photos on *American Butterflies* and *Birding* magazines. She was also the field editor for bird sightings for East Central Florida for Florida Ornithological Society's publication *Florida Field Naturalist* for many years.

Both were active in Lake Region Audubon Society for many years with Buck serving as president and Linda as editor for LRAS's newsletter *Eagle's View*. Linda has also been an active member of Beta Sigma Phi, an international women's sorority, for over 50 years. She has served in every office and committees and received Woman of the Year award six times.

They both serve on the Technical Assessment Group that evaluates lands for possible purchase by Polk County's Environmental Lands Program.

Their volunteer activities give them an opportunity to share their passion for butterflies with others and over the years they have led many field trips for both birds and butterflies.

They visit the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas for four to six weeks each year. In October 2004, they were members of the Florida Sunshine Leppers, a three-member team who won the Rio Grande Prix of Butterflying with 94 species seen in a one-day period in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas.

*We are the happiest when we are in the field observing wildlife and reporting our results to the proper authorities. We do so at every opportunity. It's what keeps us young!*