



## Wildlife Window – Common Gallinules & Purple Gallinules

### Familiar Rivendell Pond Visitors

By Sue Remy, Ponds & Preserves Committee

[Woodlands Word – August 2022]

In June, the Ponds & Preserves Committee oversaw a large planting project of native aquatic plants along our Rivendell pond shorelines. This action resulted from months of research and individual pond inspections to develop a plan for the best planting success and growth. While the LMZs and plantings along shorelines are designed to help control erosion and absorb excess nutrients, they also improve water quality and create vital habitats for our wildlife friends, such as the Gallinules.

**Common Gallinules** (or Moorhens) thrive in freshwater and brackish marshes, ponds, and lakes, that have a mix of submerged, floating, and emergent aquatic vegetation and are open water year-round. They use shoreline plants for nesting, food and shelter, feeding on vegetation, seeds, snails, and insects. During our recent pond inspections, we observed many Common Gallinules, and even a mother with her baby chicks.

#### Let's learn more about our Gallinules visitors.



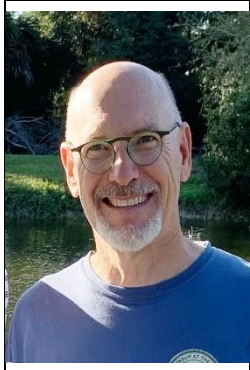
The **Common Gallinule** (*Gallinula chloropus*) swims like a duck and walks atop floating vegetation with its long, slender toes. Mostly charcoal gray in color, the forehead is boldly marked with a brilliant red shield over the bill that makes it easy to identify. It also has a white racing stripe down its side. It squawks and whinnies from thick cover in marshes and ponds, peeking in and out of vegetation. They stride through water pumping their head forward with tail held horizontally and wings held up over the back. (Photos by Bob Frank.)

A rarer sight, the **American Purple Gallinule** (*Porphyrio martinica*), is a beautiful bird. Sporting vivid body colors of red, blue, green, aquamarine, and violet, with bright yellow legs, its color palette blends surprisingly well in our subtropical wetlands. Like the Common Gallinules, these long-legged, long-toed birds are seen stepping gingerly across water lilies and other floating vegetation. They hunt frogs and invertebrates or pick at tubers for food. Purple Gallinules are remarkable fliers; unlike their Common Gallinules counterparts who seldom fly and flight is labored.



While Gallinules are common in Rivendell, their populations are constantly threatened with declining habitats due to over-development, loss of vegetation, and excessive use of pesticides. Our LMZs and shorelines plantings improve our pond wildlife habitats, as well as control erosion damage. Working together, we can keep our ponds healthy and vibrant. Our wildlife friends thank you for your support by visiting our community ponds. All of us benefit from the beauty and vibrancy of nature in our community – it is why we moved here.

#### Evidence of the Beneficial Impact of Ponds Plantings on Wildlife.



**Bob Frank, P&P Chair**, spends many hours observing and photographing wildlife in and around our area. Recently he remarked, *“I have noticed “resident” Gallinules (Moorhens) on Placid Lake and Eagle Lake in the past 6 months as the shoreline plantings have taken hold. I had not seen them anywhere prior except around the littoral zone adjacent to Rivendell Lake (East and West) where there was already a good bit of vegetation growing into the water.*

*I think the birds have moved in because the plants have created new habitat for them. They like to hang out in the areas where there is a water-vegetation-shoreline interface. That is where I see them all over Florida. **For me, this is the first tangible evidence of the positive impact of the pond plantings on our wildlife.**”*