



### Species Profile:

## **Purple Gallinule *Porphyrio martinicus***

We had a rare visitor in North Augusta over the summer, the Purple Gallinule. Not only did we get a visit from a pair of the birds, but they nested and hatched four baby gallinules that were present at the park up until late August. Over 128 different species of birds have been recorded at Brick Pond Park since it opened in 2008. The Purple gallinule is one of the most colorful and unusual. John Harpring notified the city of the bird the first week of May and sent us the beautiful photo above. The breeding range for the Purple gallinule is generally found in the coastal region of the southern states, seeing them this far inland and breeding was a special treat for birders and citizens. These birds are considered “vagrants” and it is not unusual for them to travel out of their range. They live in the United States but are also considered a migratory tropical bird that lives mostly in South America.

Purple gallinules are in the rail family of birds and are commonly called the Swamp Hen. The adult birds are shaped like a small chicken with feather colors of dark blue to purple, a green back with white feathers on the rump. The beak is red with a yellow tip and they have a patch of sky blue on their head. The yellow legs have large feet and long toes so that they can effortlessly walk on lily pads and other weeds while foraging for food. Male and female birds look the same in this species, but the males are slightly larger. They are omnivores and will eat plant and animals including seeds, flowers, bugs, snails, spiders, fish and earthworms. They work together to build the nest and raise their young on piles of vegetation floating in ponds. In 2014, the bird was listed as a common bird in steep decline due to the rate at which the population has plummeted, reported as 83% from 1966-2014.